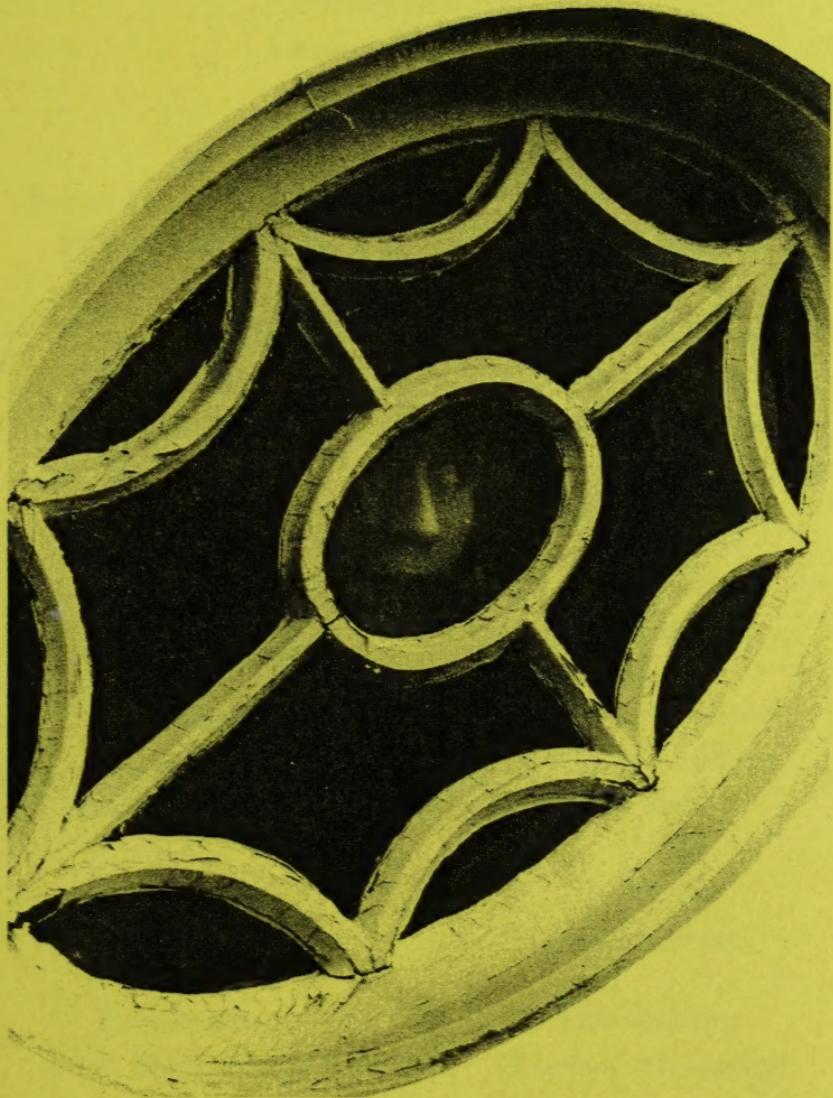


Fall Term 1996  
Volume IV, Number 3



# The Courant



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# Introduction: A Dark Light

---

O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

from "To Brooklyn Bridge"  
Hart Crane

In a magazine that continues to expand its horizons as the number and kind of writers continue to amaze, choosing an outstanding submission for the Smitty Prize borders on the arbitrary. We are tempted this time around to present the prize to the magazine itself, particularly for the wonderfully playful combinations that Caroline Whitbeck and Kate Zangrilli have brought to our attention in The Courant's spring '96 order of events.

Consider, for instance, the poems that frame the spring term's collection. Kelly Sherman's "Not Really" dissects the deep reluctance in generosity, even the latent selfishness of it.

We might give you all we've got  
and still suck air — cold — up through our nostrils.  
We might truly think we love you,  
but not really.

In "Thank You and to a Prettier Poem," Erik Jungbacker's adopted persona does give all he has and happily admits that it may not be much. But it is still everything he has to offer.

Thank you, thank you — you know if I had a larger vocabulary  
you'd get a prettier poem,

but something tells me you aren't searching for eloquence.

when you breath so so quietly I have imagined what your chest is feeling  
mmm... I tell myself  
Thank you

Mini-collections of poetry and fiction at the beginning of the volume presage the whimsical ways the works illuminate one another. Kim Ballard's "Escalator" enjoys the same precision of a Stephen Crane poem that Sara Bright's "Red Moon" does. In the first, the simple event of a child running up the down escalator resonates in the care for detail.

the top is not the place to go.  
(especially if it's the wrong direction).  
so down she comes,  
backwards,  
watching what she's leaving get smaller.

before she had hardly moved and yet she had sprinted.  
two steps at a time and only a foot maybe.  
maybe five.  
it's not the thing to do.  
she agrees  
and turns around  
to face things she hasn't seen yet  
and watches them get bigger.

In "Red Moon," we are climbing again, this time to the top of Bright Mountain (a deliberate play on Sara's part?). Again, the detail resonates precisely because it is relentless:

Up that perilous  
Road  
With the deep ruts  
I've been stuck in.

The darkness enveloped us  
On that dirt path which  
Wound up the mountain  
Through the woods.

Finally reaching it and  
Looking out over the  
Whole town, lit up like a field of stars;  
We were closer to  
Being Gods  
Than ever before.  
It took one hell of a rain  
To bring us down.

The “it” is the red moon Bright and her companion have made out of the beacon light atop a radio antenna. That modest detail informs the restrained irony of the whole poem. The few poems in between these two study the same subject through different bands of the human prism. Heath Cabot’s “The Wake” is a poem of dread, a waking into darkness, not light. Chris Diamond’s villanelle, “Travelers,” ends with modest echo of Frost’s “Stopping by Woods”:

Where silence guides is where the darkness glows,  
Far off at journey’s bitter end, some day.  
The longest road is sinuous and slow  
I wish there were an easy way to go.

Zangrilli and Whitbeck put Jake Berman’s “The Lights of Alamosa” next to these two as if to create a conversation. In a kind of wilderness, Berman’s observer finds strength in the lights of a not-so-distant city:

But distant the lights  
The band of lights, white, orange, and a few flashing  
red  
The lights of Alamosa

But more, much more

A picture, a glimpse, a vignette of humanity,  
A vision of another world,  
The lights of tomorrow,

The next journey beyond,  
The next leg,  
The future, the past, all things distant.

How easily words match thoughts,  
How uneasy they fit to feelings,  
It was so clear then

A moment, a bright hand in a wild darkness  
Reached and clutched me and shook me,  
Shook me until my chemistry was perfect and my heart  
pounding,

Then shaken, the glowing lights flowed into me,  
The moment held me prisoner,  
And I fell captive to the present.

The lights measure the boundary between what we might call the abstract absolute and the here and now, and for Berman the boundary is liberating: "I balanced on a huge beam,/without hesitation, free,/I knew just where I was, though I had not been there/before." The balance is not an answer so much as an endless echo between inscrutable nature and the lights thrust upward from the city:

The magic was there,  
Truth and triviality, right or not,  
Questions answered effectively

Answered from mountains  
Canyons

Valleys  
Sand  
Sage  
Lights

After Bright's "Red Moon," we are literally transported to the heavens where we hear heavenly voices at once colloquial and abstract. Yaqub Prowell's "Earth Song" and Ted Dewitt's "Heaven and Infinity" both offer us voices in unusual contexts. The celestial voice in "Earth Song" uses Prowell as a medium. Dewitt's voices are at the border between life and death.

With this dramatic introduction to the volume, we are aware of metaphysics in subsequent selections partly because there are sinuous strands weaving them together. A story about one brother remembering another, "Death is a Star" by Tristan Roberts follows Dewitt. "Heather," a story about sister switching roles from needy to needed follows "Death is a Star." After Julia Galaburda's "Heather," we have her story about the family pet, "Rocket," which precedes "The Falling Sickness," Eva Mayer's powerful vignette about an epileptic dog and preternaturally patient sister.

While there are many other delights in the arrangement of the volume — the wonderful tributes to Bernell Downer, Sean Casey, and Heath Cabot, for instance — the early set of poems and stories establishes the tone for the collection, a tone that is fully realized in the poems of Nathan Littlefield and Charlie Finch. Littlefield's poem, "My Attempt to Understand Demons and the Devil as Memories" is deceptive in its simple stream of consciousness. What seems to start as a poem about childhood fears evolves into a musing on our attempts to make a universe, complete with good and evil, simply because the terror of its immensity is lessened when we make it ours. Littlefield approaches this subject through the prism of memory. Yet his memories are so elemental as to thrust him back into a permanent present.

Expression may be

My earliest memory of life  
A feeling or a need to stand  
That is so simple to convey  
When looking back to then  
There is no sardonic laugh  
At its straightforwardness  
Only a wonderment about it  
Or whether it continues now

Littlefield is discussing nascent language. When we stand and express ourselves as infants, we are naming the world. To name our parents is to acknowledge for the first time the presence of a world independent of our own consciousness even as we make that world a direct product of our own consciousness. In this memory, free of irony, of self-consciousness, Littlefield describes the essence of modernism, the first and perhaps last pure act of creation in every human life, the Adamic naming of things.

At the end of the poem, we see the romantic will to recreate that initial act of creation, this time by reversing the act: starting with the object and seeking out its origin.

Everything reflects life  
When reduced to simplicity  
Those dreams spin now  
The expression of a need  
Want of a devil  
Creation of an unbelieved hell  
Poeish in execution  
With something else  
Eventually connecting it to life  
Attempts to distill being  
Into understandable units  
Or the belief that an ocean is better understood  
As a billion buckets of saltwater.

Unfortunately, we cannot reduce things to simplicity. The

dreams and memories are no longer acts without irony, but the new, awful expression of need qualified by an acute awareness. How liberating it is then to see Littlefield leaven the malice in the universe with the childlike simplicity of an ocean not as the vast wasteland or swirling vortex of Poe, our most troubled American romanticist, but as a child's extension of a beach toy, the delightfully intrusive "billion buckets" amounting to better belief.

Two short works by Mozhan Navabi and Maureen Chun punctuate the conversation between Littlefield and Finch. In "Where" by Navabi, the noise surrounding our own troubles is stilled by the silence of the forest. It is a bitter pill once again in the spirit of Stephen Crane:

Impulsive, piquant, the roots of clouds...  
dreams & music share ascension

Tell me, forest  
Of profession I hear much  
Of education I hear much  
Of love, and despair, happiness and anxiety;  
what of you?

Our relationship to our own self-importance is literally turned upside down three times: once with the image that the branches are the roots of heaven, again with the contrast between our projections of ourselves against the tree's essence, and once more in the suggestion that we are merely interlopers in a private conversation between poet and forest.

Chun's poem is still quieter, the faintest suggestion of a person implied in a scarf that really only exists as the slightest stroke adding to the broad strokes nature makes removed from the eye by window and street.

Through the window, across the street—  
Briefly—when the snow is falling heavily,

Heavily, the surface of the houses,  
The trees, your sand-colored scarf,  
moves in a current of pure white strokes

All of this leads to Charlie Finch's implosive etudes. In "The Problem with Writing," Finch is in full sardonic bloom, thanking William Carlos Williams out of the side of his mouth for the so-called joy of nature's disappointing our master plans for it. He calls Wallace Stevens on the carpet because there is no figure in it. In an erudite continuation of the discussion begun in the early set of poems about journeys, Finch debunks Stevens' celebration of the act of creation rather than the creation itself:

The only mother of beauty is death on extended wings.  
(But to where  
Stevens?)

We are sorely tempted to think that the arrangement of the parenthetical line is a tip of the hat to e. e. cummings. Surely the conversational tone is reminiscent of that prankster and his New Yorkish cohort Frank O'Hara:

I am in April, fellows, and it is not  
the cruellest month, nor has it given any sweet showers.

The allusions are so thick we wonder if Finch might love what he only professes to like. If Eliot is a letdown too and the necessary angel is only a thing with feathers, then the problem with writing with Finch is that he knows too much. Finch is too mature a young poet to sit on brood for long, however. The tone bespeaks his true intention, and he tips the reader off with a pleasant little pun:

Still, let us here! The unreal has a reality all its own in  
poetry,  
says our necessary angel.

Finch believes this and doesn't believe it at once. That's the cruel discipline of April: you're coming and going. Finch makes fun of his own preoccupation, the inevitable obsession with self that follows, in the poem's closing gambit:

To tire of a god, or nature, our spring, all after writing  
for me!  
What travesty.

Stevens, Eliot, and Williams were not writing for Charlie Finch any more than they were writing for *The Courant*. Certainly, the quietly intimated modernist, the tragic son of modernism, Hart Crane (not to be confused with Stephen Crane who was, thankfully, a newspaper reporter first . . . and while we are on the subject, it is interesting to note that these other modernists had real jobs as insurance salesman, banker, and surgeon respectively) was writing desperately for himself. He literally tried to make of the Brooklyn Bridge a bridge over that grey boundary between the here and now.

So, when Finch turns "hears" into "here," the suggestion deliberately undermines the sour grapes of the poem's majority opinion. That suggestion becomes reality in the careful study of a sunset over water in "Allusion and Elusion," a poem about poetry as language ventured forth.

Eluding refractions of light, alluding color,  
as green overlaps with and dulls  
the only vibrant blue,  
that color of the sky,  
that color of lost seas,  
a spangled sunset with  
a thousand equally dappled memories attached to its  
trailing red dust. Spread along a lake of  
the purest water,  
innocence manifest,  
like the mark of gravity on an infant.

This is the modernist's version of Wordsworth's "Daffodils," an encomium to the "only mother of beauty," a sunset over water. The light, of course, must be the logos of meaning because it colors everything. Whereas the "sun lends nothing to the familiar" in "The Problem...," here it is elusive and allusive, avoiding meaning and tantalizing us with possible meanings. And in its dimming, it blurs the boundary between sky and water, the horizon a uniform blue/green fictive mundo of "lost seas." The apostrophes of light on the water become our memories drawn to the horizon by the sun's red dust. But in that changing light, our efforts bespeak our wizened innocence, our will to reclaim the purest water. So it is that even in the child's first act, there is a mark of gravity. Creation is serious business, the child's first attempt to be human marking the boundary crossed from innocence into world-weary knowledge. And despite his protestations to the contrary, Finch's poetry wills that problem into beauty by making language work in opposition to itself, "the mark of gravity on an infant."

The Smitty prize winners for the Volume IV, Number 2 are Nathan Littlefield and Charlie Finch.

*Craig Thorn*

# My Attempt to Understand Dreams and the Devil as Memories

---

I can remember dreams  
New agnosticism with hellish bends  
Which were truly attempts  
To run home, then to the schoolyard  
Back with first grade bruises all healed  
They were simply sores from running  
Back home in my mind

Expression may be  
My earliest memory of life  
A feeling or a need to stand  
That is so simple to convey  
When looking back to then  
There is no sardonic laugh  
At its straightforwardness  
Only a wonderment about it  
Or whether it continues now

Those hell dreams  
Closet devils, bedtime sheet-forts  
Are so fresh in my mind  
I could reach out any time  
To feel the breath of demons  
Pushing my exposed face back  
Toward those nights and dreams  
Hotwired in my mind

Everything reflects life  
When reduced to simplicity  
Those dreams spin now  
The expression of a need  
Want of a devil

Creation of an unbelieved hell  
Poeish in execution  
With something else  
Eventually connecting it to life  
Attempts to distill being  
Into understandable units  
Or the belief that an ocean is better understood  
As a billion buckets of saltwater

*Nathan Littlefield*

# The Problem With Writing

---

Joy! To say that jonquils tire of their  
fine, lilting petals before people  
tire of the same petals.

That the sun lends nothing  
to the unfamiliar! Thanks, Williams.

The only mother of beauty is a death on extended wings.

(But to where

Stevens?)

I am in April, fellows, and it is not  
the cruellest month, nor has it given any sweet showers.  
Still, let us here! The unreal has a reality all its own in

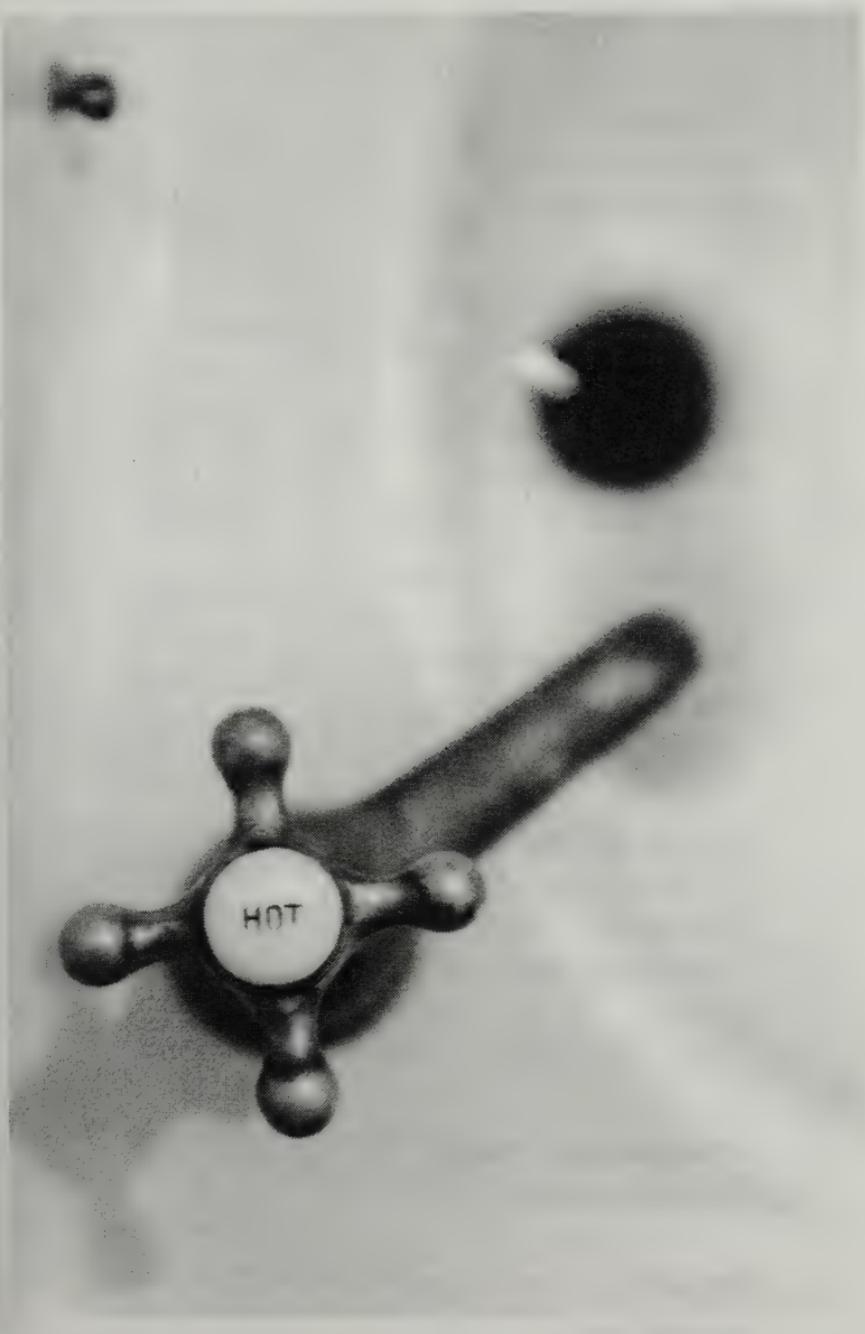
poetry,

says our necessary angel.

To tire of a god, or nature, our spring, all after writing  
for me!

What travesty.

*Charlie Finch*



*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Poem

---

50 cents,

you write about Astrid  
you, gray  
in your robe, blue  
you write about Astrid

or a cat's tail, anything  
over newsprint and toast crumbs

smug in your  
breakfasty nook you  
write about Astrid in the  
cosmos, the coffee cup

yes, you are aging and  
Astrid is  
red-lipped and

you are writing to Astrid  
for Astrid has  
hatboxes  
stuffed with old  
paper,  
old closets and

windowboxes: "Astrid  
w/ red begonias."

Astrid  
smoldering in  
your garage with  
black and chrome  
cars

"O Astrid"  
cooks a brown egg  
lacquers her fingernails  
lives in New York  
as do you

Astrid,  
tales of the menus  
tales of the men and  
of the grease

(All of Astrid's  
friends are Franks  
and Jacks, they wear  
blue pants, send  
postcards)

you wonder at  
Astrid, at  
cherrystones,  
the insides of her  
mouth,

at skeins of red wool  
at her stocking-clad  
legs

(her calves pumping  
blood and heels:  
brackish, seaworthy legs)

smoking  
cigarettes in fast cars  
cigarettes at the breakfast table

mannequin, Astrid  
muse, Astrid:  
a plastic brow  
that learned to sweat

and you  
those tremored hands  
“O the vein  
and liver-spotted!”  
and

fruit heavy as  
plums, that dusky  
rot and bruising skin  
bruising in, you  
that sweat and age  
all flannel-kneed  
pajamas,  
grasping brown life  
from every gray hair:

longing at last  
for the red  
ripe lips

for a kiss.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Using Force

---

I am going to force you out  
out at rickety hours of the night  
and not look you in your purple-brown baby's face  
until you are blue with breath and white with life

and I am going to spit you on the ground with all  
the mushy cakes of split rotting apples and  
the dangerous gold of yellow jackets that decorate them  
and when you are stung with their venom and poked  
by their black high heels and antennae spears I might  
lift you and your tattered sleeves

carry you in my shoe with the innards suffocating your  
sweet scented air of lightness  
until I reach my zenith, where my legs rank and whine  
and my back finds shadows to be pillowied on  
and I see the density of the sky and bite the brick with  
my eyes  
and then  
I might pull you out by your arms, roll you  
onto your stomach and onto your feet and recite your  
sacred prayers  
flash out your beauty and your beaten, burnt skin

because you are a poem and you have to be hard  
and you have to have been everywhere, every color  
singed by every poison and rashed by every texture  
then and only then will I speak of you,  
look into your ruddy foreign face

eye by pregnant eye.

*Caitlin Berrigan*

# The Palm Leaf

---

She wants to be the well-fed artist  
Or poet—who are you to object?

She sees the moon as a tool for a gail  
as an owl night is just a syncopation

Confusing purge with thirst  
until life and anger is just a

reflection of a reflection of a reflection

Groping for the man who can lift her  
or lean in one breath and become God

She stirs the palm leaf with her words  
the palm leaf fans with veins

of veins of veins of veins

Even she cannot predetermine  
the course of death or love

Although it's a great job I might add  
Her hand gets sweaty on the stem

*Christina Richardson*

## **“The impression of...”**

---

The impression of  
our nap  
fades.  
Rise sweet grass!

*Erica Fruiterman*

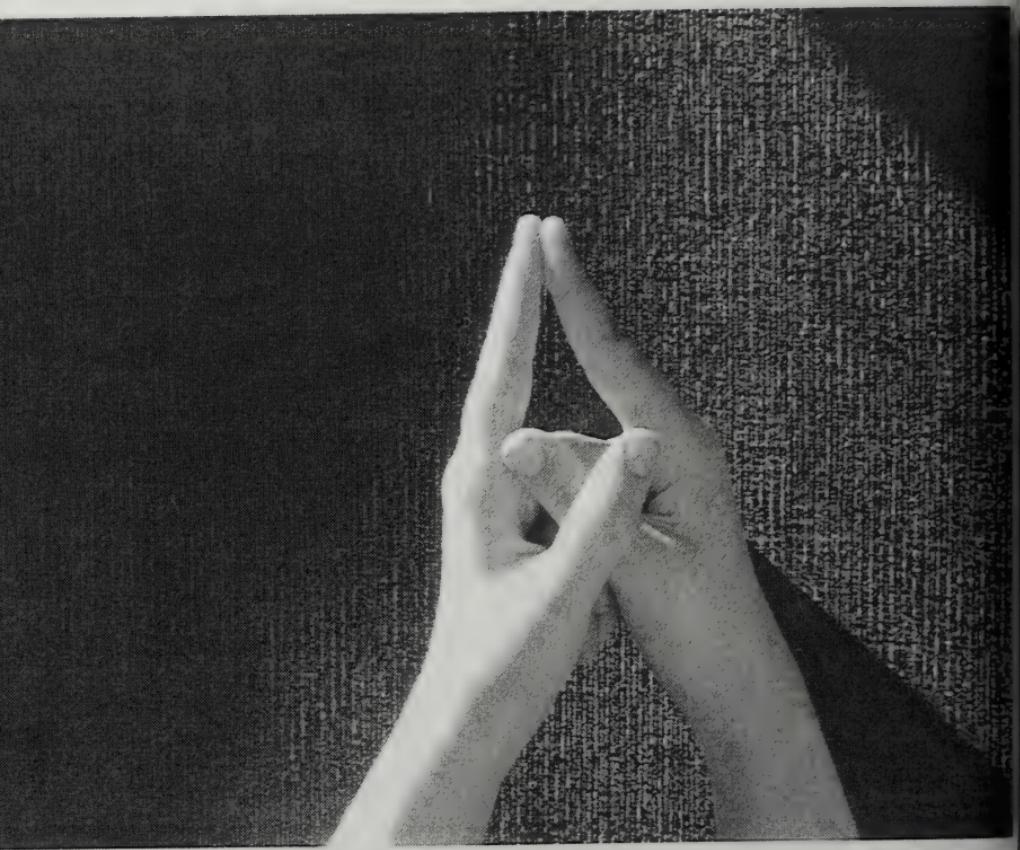
# That Cycle of Leaves

We drive silent  
down a street overhung with branches  
and sunlight drops from each hard consoling leaf  
to each it's own shadow as they smack across the hood  
they seem to know they wave  
Goodbye Goodbye  
remind me a of a murder, as they all seem to stand over  
your sun blanket  
block the light and try to kill you but  
they won't they won't  
“So this is where you live.”  
He says—but he knows without telling cause he can  
see the books  
in their cases, each handkerchief in it's fold, the hand  
lotion on the counter and the piano's keys  
He drops me onto the lawn.  
Later I'll play some slow music—like a light left on, a  
parent waiting up  
It makes my shoulders shudder.  
It makes me cry.

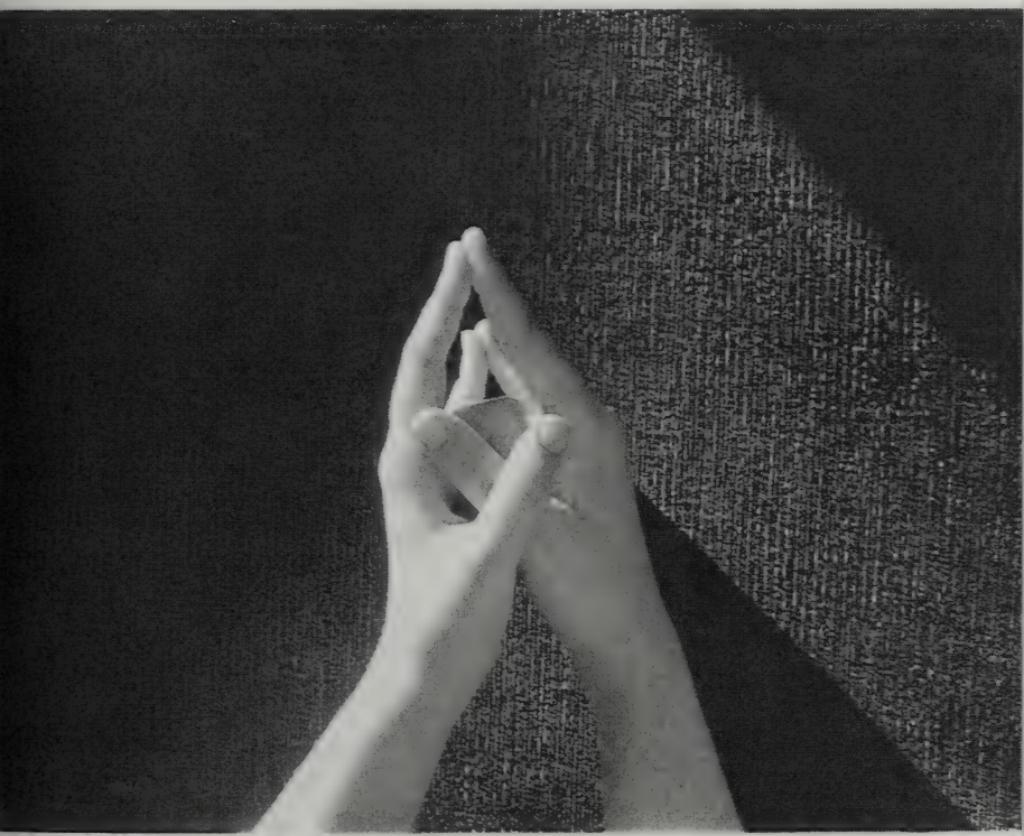
*Christina Richardson*



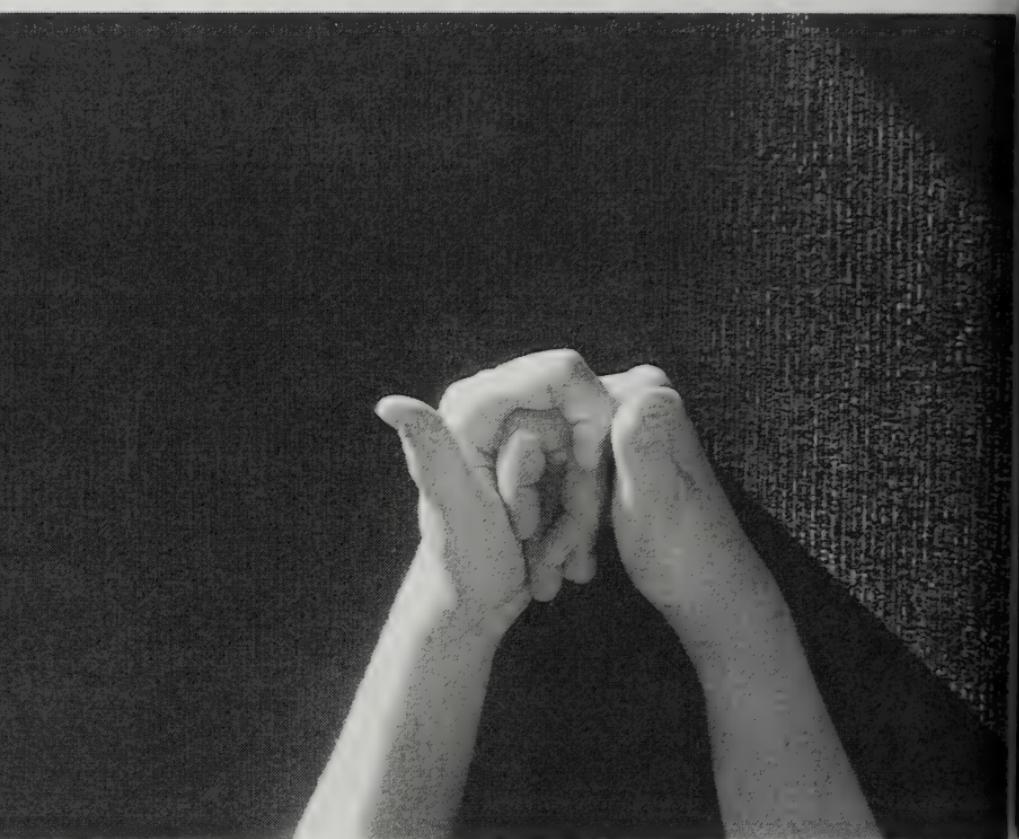
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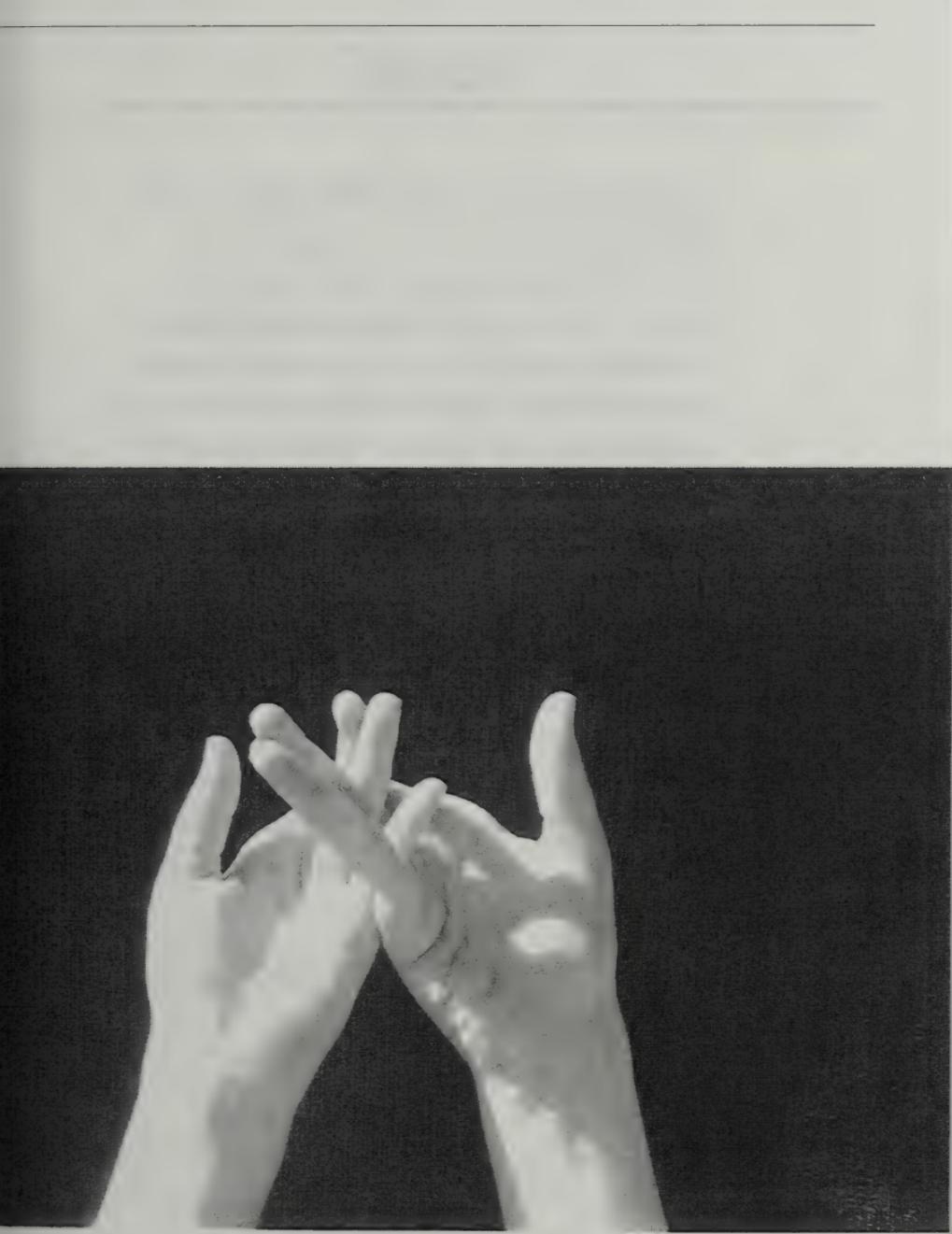
*Kate Nesin*



*Kate Nesin*



*Kate Nesin*



*Kate Nesin*

# Elegy

---

You were always urbane, witty. You wore linen. I came into the matter with your well-being directly concerned, but I knew, as you did, that tea becomes dilute under the weight of physics, or fate. One of the sciences, you know. Still, you're attached to some aurora in Italy or Connecticut. You were the voice from the other world, delightful sorrow or veracity, caught in some swirling storm. And now-no. To the chilled moon, some green lawn, or wicker chair. The truth? I loved you. As much as vibrancy was, I cringed, and in the end, diluted, fell from the ether, stained or bruised, milk or memory, until all that was left was the wind, rustling with vague insistences in the leaves of an autumn tree.

*Charlie Finch*

# Distance

---

"I miss the human truth of your smile"  
- John Ashberry

Propelled ambiguity and us,  
the half hearted limpness of your palms,  
or, just the same, lost walks in a far off place.  
What I miss is the straight hair across your  
forehead, the mingled or dissipated sounds,  
the red cyclamens you cared for until spring,  
only to abandon when they withered...

Azure of sky and sea, pounding the shore  
wearily, even in beauty. There is no absolute.  
I was wrong, or sick.  
I wish I had seen the sand scattered beneath our feet,  
and the faintest light that the sun gave  
before it broadened and sank.

*Charlie Finch*

## “The waves are large and brackish...”

---

The waves are large and brackish,  
kicking up foam and sand. Mute power,  
tumbling around me,  
as you watch the familiar farce unfold.  
In the late afternoon the wind presses down,  
halting their benign neglect. The water is calm,  
smooth as a mirror, opalescent positivity,  
and I float from certainty, as though  
I were attached to some much attenuated rope.  
What I am navigating I do not know. Perhaps I shan't  
ever, but  
The shadow tinted grey, reminds me of the hour.  
Eventually,  
darkness corners the sun. And I follow the path of stolid  
mutability,  
as much as I will, dry and late,  
with guilt, thistle, mixed or matched,  
the final unconquered and unseen place.

*Charlie Finch*

# Graínne

---

Let us go from here  
release me from an old man's abstraction  
a battle-prize, a token, a trinket  
Let us escape from circumlocutions of manners  
plots and intrigues  
stilted, shallow chatter  
Free me from the surface scum of stagnant puddles  
Let our life, our love,  
be measureless as the embrace of Manannan's sea.

*Katherine Gilbert*

# Glimpse of a Man Across the Room

People say

skin and breath  
are gone each vapor as it rises from skin each contour  
and panel of my existence  
brush lips

their eyes

Their eyes are always the same  
elusive and sparkling—like water

I try to send out a message

across the skinnyspace between us that has no room for  
symbiotic perfectness  
They never reach you

When you see him

You will know

and yet

I sleep ready in my best dress  
awake only with the moon and burglars  
I stare out my empty white window

*Christina Richardson*



Nick Wilson

*Nick Wilson*

# A Condition

I don't remember losing my voice any more than I remember growing older. The change from a normal, vocal person to a mute happened like a natural process, as if my genes dictated it. How suddenly I became aware of my affliction seems amusing, and I'd probably find it darkly funny if it involved someone besides myself.

I completely lost my speech about a year ago, though my voice had been a little weak for a while before. It didn't really bother me, since my wife died young and we never had children, meaning that communication at home was nonexistent except at a few occasional family get-togethers. It wasn't a problem then, I could get my point across or ask for something easily enough, though I had to shout if I was talking to somebody in another room. My job didn't give me any trouble in that respect either, it didn't involve much dialogue outside some quick greetings, and nobody really cared if you were quiet, so long as they understood what you were saying.

When I woke up that day -it was March 17th- I got out of bed and took a shower, humming to myself. The vibrations were barely audible, my voice had almost reached its dying point. Humming, I towed myself dry, ate a quick breakfast, during which I hummed between bites, shaved since I had absentmindedly forgotten to before, then traveled down five flights of stairs after finding out that the elevator wasn't working. Saying good morning to one of the janitors, I finally stopped my humming. That was the last time I ever hummed, it's impossible now, my vocal cords are completely useless.

I drove to work listening to classic rock on the radio, my number three preset. One and two were both talk radio, which I loved. There was one guy, he was on at six in the evening, who talked about regular stuff, nothing social or political like most of the other hosts. His ability at conversation was amazing. The man was very articulate, much better spoken than the usual talk show people, with a smooth voice. Not very deep or booming, just something close to perfectly average. I've read that, in reality, beauty is

actually an image of the average. Eyes aren't too far apart or close together, mouth isn't especially long or short, all the body's ratios - they had a computer break down form into different ratios- are neither too great nor too small. He had that kind of voice, almost completely average. That was how my voice would have been if I could've controlled things like that. I don't listen to talk radio anymore, I can't. When I hear those perfect, dear, audible voices coming from totally normal, working mouths I feel as if I'm debasing myself by listening. Maybe it's envy or frustration, or possibly just a change in preference. The results are the same, so it isn't important.

At work I parked closer to the building than usual, next to George's new car, a Honda Accord he'd told me about a month before, when I saw him last. I tried to remember where he'd been transferred to, where in the building he was working, but I couldn't recall. The last time we'd been on the same project was at least three years ago, when the two of us were editing encyclopedia articles that were being sent to a software company. Soon after that, he'd been transferred someplace or other, and I'd been moved to in-house research. The building's outer halls and offices were windowed and pretty lively, but the archives, where most research took place, could almost be called tomb-like. They occupied most of the basement and formed a core of stacks up the buildings middle, meaning that they had no windows. With only florescent bulbs they had an industrial dreariness to them, and only a few people ever worked there at a time, so it was like spending most of the day alone in a giant metal and carpet cave.

I walked across the lobby to an open elevator, down the fourth floor hall, and into my office, which was really kind of nice. The wall opposite the door was windowed from knee level up, and against the led wall stood my desk, with a new computer sitting on it and a big leather chair behind it. It was too bad I only spent about half an hour in there a day. The basket marked "IN" had four sheets of paper, three requesting some minor details that would probably take only fifteen minutes to find, and another looking for background on Charlemagne's son.

This building held a big collection of material about medieval Europe and a few things about Rome. We had all kinds of

documents and fiches and odd junk, so if a publisher or some college kid working on his thesis needed facts they'd pay us a certain amount of money, depending on the difficulty in getting their material, then we'd find what they wanted. I wound up knowing more about Old Europe than most history teachers, and it surprised everyone when I swept "The Romans" or "Pope Gregory" on Jeopardy.

For the rest of the morning I pored over sources about Louis, the son. At 11:24 - I had just glanced at my watch and the time is lodged in my mind- Reynold Anderson tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "You want to put that off for lunch?"

I'd thought I was the only one on that floor, so Reynold startled me when he came up from behind, but I replied, "Sure." No sound left my mouth, though. I repeated, Sure," my lips moved smoothly, without effort, yet still silence. Again I tried without result. I started to try to apologize for myself. I pushed each breath through my throat, my face and body tightening, twisted in frustration over the loss of a function that should have been so reflexive. I didn't notice the look on Reynold's face as I went through my performance, but somehow I remember it as an expression of bewilderment. Bugging eyes took in the scene, shrank, gave way to laughing twitches at the corners of his mouth, then unmasked confusion.

"Are you okay?" He managed.

I think I'd realized then that something was wrong with my throat, even if whatever I thought was miles from the truth. I should have nodded, that would be the obvious way to say "Yes" without speaking. But behind my initial realization I had lost all sense of rationality- I didn't do anything so obvious. I tried everything but the easiest, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, hugging him, all while subconsciously opening and shutting my mouth like a fish trying to talk. Reynold pushed me away, but I grabbed his leg as I fell and accidentally tripped him. I pinned him on the floor by the shoulders, picked up a pen, and wrote "I'm fine" on the palm of my left hand. "Sorry. I just can't talk" I scrawled below it.

• • • •

Nearly everything in the seven months following that is material, not worth detail. They thought I'd had a nervous breakdown, and I was taken tranquilized and wrapped in a straight jacket and to the first hospital. Tests were given, once they decided that I wasn't suicidal or about to bite off somebody's ear. The tests proved nothing but the obvious: nothing traumatic or mind-altering had happened to me, I was mentally and physically able, and the only issue was my inability -or they believed failure- to speak. After a little more the doctors realized that I didn't belong there, since my condition was completely physical, so I went on to hospital two. Immediately they put me through more tests, then the same tests were administered again with a few new ones, as they tried to discover something that might explain my condition. They learned that my vocal cords had stopped working. Therapy began at a third hospital. In all, I spent seven months institutionalized, then was discharged, a medical anomaly, and went back to my job and my apartment. The doctors have more or less put me on the back burner, except for correspondence every month and repeated tests every six. I communicate with them via computer, one they gave me -very up to date, much more than occasional e-mail messages require. One benefit of a strange problem is that you're treated very well, given plenty of attention compared to something relatively routine.

• • • •

The life I've entered into isn't really my own, it's more a creation of the condition's. I suggest and it replies, vetoes, decides for me. The condition holds me in, and it is only against its will that I attempt to leave the house, stick my neck out in any way. Inevitably I'm pushed back again, as if to prove it right. Any mishap can send me running for cover. Having a handicap has crippled me with a hypersensitivity to its consequences. Waiters stare at the notebook I use to communicate like it's a gun, and as they read it, it becomes a curiosity. They flip back in the pages to see what the voiceless man writes, if it's strange or revealing, with the same mind as a little boy first peering at a naked woman. Always a quick glance, because they know there's something innately wrong in what they're

doing, but something makes them look. What's worse than that, though, is the condescension I receive. I'm either gawked at or fawned over. I can't stand either and resolve once again to remain in my own world. Sitting at the kitchen table I can carry on a conversation in my mind not wanting for speech.

For a month after leaving the hospital I tried working at my old job. The company offered me early retirement and even a big bon voyage check, but I said I'd rather stay. Why confine myself to the apartment when I could be out among people? I wanted to go on living with my condition pushed aside as if it were irrelevant. My life after the discharge would be some inspirational story: Man copes with inability to speak, leads normal life. After two weeks I knew I wanted to quit, I couldn't take it. Endless explanations of continuous misunderstandings, people holding doors wide open for me like I couldn't walk through unassisted, and my silence weighing on me every time I pulled out the notebook. Simple questions and three word answers became projects. Stunted phrases scrawled in a 3-by-5 notebook replaced free-flowing speech. I couldn't stand seeing my reality contrasted against what should be, what everyone could do and what I once could. The condition pushed me down - I didn't give up because an obstacle was too big.

Mostly I lie around, either in front of the TV or sometimes messing with my computer. I don't understand too much of that stuff and I doubt I'll ever use the machine for anything besides e-mailing the hospital or playing solitaire. There's no reason to move from the TV anyway. What else is there? Things I'll never figure out, more reassurance that I'm a freak, a fluke, something perfect for a carnival if it wasn't so mundane. Every day is identical to the last, so much so that I lose track of the date for stretches. The day is immaterial, since for me it could be any. I'll watch a morning show, usually pieces of all three, with what passes for breakfast on my lap, then drift into afternoon, marking the change by throwing away breakfast's long empty paper plate. I sleep, usually until eight or nine o'clock, when I microwave dinner and watch until the programs become too inane. Some nights I go to bed and others I fall asleep on the couch only to wake up the next morning, usually when *The Price is Right* starts, and spend hours more sitting there.

At times I tire of the TV, its people, and their voices, so I sit at the kitchen table working on a puzzle neglected to a point where the completed section is gathering dust. Mostly I sit in a torpor until boredom drives me back to the couch or, occasionally, outside. Television, sleep, sometimes 18 hours a day in bed. Absolutely no radio, except classical every once in a while, muted when a host or commercial comes on. I used to read aloud to myself at home, so I don't touch books- just another reminder.

The urge to actually do something strikes often, but it takes me a long time to act. Past embarrassments are brought back to light, persuading me to stay where I am. Logically, something will happen to ruin things, and I stay logical until my routine becomes too much.. Television loses its appeal, the radio drives me insane, and quiet voices in my head grow louder, coercing me into reneging my promise of solitude. Of course I fight it, the rest of the world and I were meant to stay apart, and I know it. I'll only come crawling back here, wishing I had listened to reason and never left. Circumstance, genetics, whatever gave me this condition let the most essential thing I possessed atrophy and die.

I have to drive over to somebody if I want to do anything since I can't use a phone. What ought to be simple has become an all day endeavor, to find an old friend who's free for dinner takes hours. It's like when I was in grade school, when I'd get on my bike and ride around seeing if anyone was home, except that was only around the neighborhood. Now I know people who live a half hour distant, and are separated from my next choice for dinner by 40 minutes of highway. There's no way to tell if the ride will even be worth the time. Maybe they're food shopping, maybe they're on vacation, maybe they just don't look out the window because they think it's a neighbor beeping for his kid to hurry up in the bathroom. Nothing is certain once I leave the house. I suppose we could swap letters, setting up dates months in advance so we don't interfere with their plans, but we don't. When we do meet, having regular briefs on the outside world might give material for conversation, which is usually halting and shallow, because over time we've become unfamiliar, my non-communication worsening the situation. That won't happen though; I'm not going to correspond with any-

body. For 7 months, I fell off the face of the earth in the eyes of my friends - I was institutionalized after a nervous breakdown. I'm sure there was a lot of "I sure didn't see that coming, not from him at least" at work. They believed that I was gone, in a mental hospital for the rest of my life. Why should they have thought otherwise? Nobody outside the hospital was ever updated on my progress because I had no family to notify and pass word on to my friends. When I returned, many former acquaintances shied away, and even those who did welcome me back seemed distant, noncommittal. The attitude wasn't that I was sane and healthy besides one defect, but that I was a refugee from the nuthouse. Leaving again, I told few people of my reasons, and even they probably guessed that my mental troubles were showing their face again. So I didn't expect any mail from them. My disappearance pushed away acquaintances, destroyed shaky friendships, and almost crushed the best ones. Out of them all, the only person who could possibly treat me as before would be George, but he's gone. When I came back I heard that he had left the company on the tenth of March, a week before I lost my voice. His car was probably there because he was settling a few final things, and he must have left too early to hear about me, so In his mind I would be free from the neurotic stigma, but I can't find him even though I've looked into every possibility.

The last time I went out was one of the worst. For three hours I drove around, beeping in people's driveways, knocking on their doors; I tried six without luck. Finally I found Mick Pistoris home. As he came to his door and saw who had beeped in the driveway he looked a little shocked, but came outside to talk. We had a decent conversation through my notebook, and after a while I convinced him to come see a movie, and I stayed for dinner. While we were eating desert, key lime pie, Mick's two kids sat in the other room dreaming up all kinds of causes for my condition: I was an alien, AIDS, drugs (one of them wore a DARE T-shirt decorated with chocolate chip ice cream), or I was gay. I've developed a really intense hatred for small children since my release. Most people keep their true thoughts about me to themselves, but kids don't seem to be aware of things like nervous breakdowns. Whatever they think shoots right out their mouths, and it drags me back to the reality of

my place in the world. If I hadn't felt indebted to Mick for going somewhere with me, and even more because of dinner, I would have yelled at them.

Things were fine going into the movie, as good as they could be with the usual stares and complaints about slowing down the ticket line. We sat in silence- it was too dark to read my notebook-until I got up to use the bathroom half way through the movie. When I left the theater the doors locked behind me, I didn't notice them click shut. Trying to get back in, I couldn't open them and went to find an usher. The only ones close by were the ticket takers, who were standing at the top of a short staircase overlooking the snack line. Another movie was 45 minutes from starting, the line was a mile long, the whole lobby packed with people buying tickets and food. As I came up to the usher I reached into my pocket for the notebook, but it was missing. Like I usually do, I went almost hysterical trying to explain myself in sign. Pretty soon people were pointing, a few laughing, with me up at the top of the stairs gesturing and being gawked at.

I haven't ever been able to deal with stuff like that. In school I took my fair share of abuse and dished out just as much, but I wasn't the curiosity then. Would it have accomplished anything if I tried to throw it back in the crowd's face, like I did in school? What would I do anyway? I couldn't shout at them, I'd just gesture and get myself even more attention. The condition forces me to internalize when things like that happen. My release happens inside, because that only requires my understanding and action, not somebody else's. I sat over on the window ledge in front of the line, simultaneously hating and envying the people standing there. I'd be absolutely fine if I were like them, there's no doubt.

Eventually the movie ended and Mick came out looking annoyed, almost angry. He borrowed a pen and paper from a lady in the line, and I explained to him what had happened. All the frustration and anger were omitted. It wouldn't help me if one more person saw me as some self-maligning neurotic instead of a victim. We stepped between puddles on the way to the car, it must have rained during the movie, and Mick suggested that I could avoid most of this if I learned sign language.

I *had* thought of that before. About a week after my release I'd even signed up for classes, but I decided not to go. Whatever made back away, I can't tell. All the conceptions I'd built up during my life, aversion to handicaps, anything that wasn't working and couldn't be made to- I guess I couldn't be part of that. Dealing with my condition equaled breaking down and admitting my handicap. That could be the sum of all this trouble. I don't try to deal with anything. More importantly, there's some part of my mind that doesn't want to change, call it inertia. Even now it wants to see me as fine, normal, just a guy with a soft voice, like before the 17th. All these memories play in my head, trying to block out the present, reality, and all the uncertainty they bring. That's what it is- I'm a refugee from reality, full of delusions and excuses, slowly realizing that I don't want to move, think, or least of all change. I realize what's going on, that I'm doing nothing more than wallowing in self pity and half baked rationalizations, I detest myself for that, but at the same time I don't want anything else. If the present is as static as the past the future can be no different, a huge uncertainty is eliminated, and why burden myself with more uncertainty? Satisfaction, reality, and normalcy are all wonderful things- but addictive, and I've seen what happens when they're taken away.

*Nathan Littlefield*

# An Afterword on the Afterwards

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In one explosive crack, I blew God to smithereens. This was no cartoon-explosion; there were no bright red letters screaming "pow!", no yellow zigzags. In the middle of the afternoon, a week before pre-season football camp, I blew my brains out.

They did not ask questions or give me answers. They only convinced me that there is a God, and I used to doubt that sometimes in church, when everyone but me seemed to believe, and I in the family pew felt guilty for my wayward soul. They simply sent me back.

I had blown Karen Ewing and fishing in the spring to smithereens. When they sent me back, they did not say a word. They simply encased my sixteen-year-old soul into the body of an eighty-year-old man and left me alone.

I found out, as the nosy cleaning lady hustled around my room and talked mercilessly, that I was James Moran, a retired admiral in the Navy. I had a son who called himself Harmony and drove a Harley around the country, compiling a book of photographs and journalism on "gay bars". I was apparently Catholic and accepted both my son and a monthly pension. I lived a quarter-mile from Irwin High, where the real me, star quarterback for the Irwin Wildcats, used to play football.

I walked down the church aisle during my own funeral. I noticed the Smallski twins, two huge running-backs on my team, and sat behind them. They sat motionless, looking down at their hands. I knew how to make them laugh. I whistled once, quickly, the way we used to do at girls in the hall. Andy looked up sharply. I tried again, waiting for the chuckle. Mike turned around and glared. Andy said, "I think I'm going to be sick." I never knew Andy Smallski, the toughest senior in all of Irwin, could cry. He heaved and sobbed, shuddering into his arms, until his mother led him out of the church.

After three weeks, the school seemed to pull itself together. Before every game, the coach stuck out his hand and everyone on the team piled their hands on top of his in a circle. They shouted,

"Go Irwin!", like always. I hoped he said, "do it for Nate". That season they won the state title with Nick Cunningham, the second-string quarterback, responsible for the winning touchdown.

I never liked Nick while I was Nate. Nick practiced brutally; he hung a tire in his backyard and practiced throwing a football through it for hours. His hands got so chapped in the winter that his fingers bled in the middle of class. When he moved up to Varsity and took my locker, no one said anything. The Smallski's didn't even put anything in his locker. The coach said he was extremely talented; the newspaper said he had big cleats to fill.

The nosy cleaning-lady wanted to know why I had taken the janitorial job at Irwin high. It wasn't right, she contended, that a retired Navy officer empty wastebaskets. She mopped the kitchenette floor, tsking under her breath like a series of tap-dancing penguins.

For the first few days of school, Karen Ewing was a mess. I was so glad I ran to the boys' bathroom, flung open the window and released a jubilant cry to the street below. My heart fluttered wildly at the thought of her vacant stare, the black ribbon threaded loosely through her hair.

Karen visited the school psychologist on Thursday. I pretended to empty the wastebasket in the adjacent office and dust off paperweights.

"I dumped him, and he shot himself. The only thing I didn't do was pull the trigger," she said this emotionlessly, as though talking from the dead.

The counselor told her she wasn't guilty. Karen continued, oblivious to the mousy counselor. "I loved him. I was just playing hard to get. I read that in my fashion magazine: 'play hard to get'." She burst into tears. I imagined myself as Nate walking into the office suddenly. I imagined how mad Karen would act at first, but then she'd just hold me, saying it was a dirty trick but who cares. Who really cares, Nate, she'd say. You're back and that's all that matters.

"Can I help you?" The psychologist demanded. I shook my head and walked out into the hall.

Towards springtime, the Smallsky's and Nick Cunningham

went fishing down Yellowstone River. Nick talked about how Karen had asked him to the prom.

"She was talking to her friends and just laughing and laughing. Then she looked real serious and turned around. She was like: 'Hey Nick! Who you going to prom with?' I was like: 'Beats me.' Then she smiled and said, 'How about me?'" Nick reeled in a trout. The fish writhed on the end of his line, head arched back, green tail flicking up towards the sun.

I'll never get used to hearing myself in the past tense. "Nate was a player. He was always doing stuff to get attention." Was! That word imprints itself across my whole body, winds around me, binding me. Was! I am encapsulated in the past tense, and I will never get out.

My orange cat rubs against my legs and leans into the chipping white paint on the basement wall. He poses classically, the skinny cat against dilapidated wall. The local museum is hosting a display of 'Cats in the Arts': cats in paintings, cats in plaster, cats in glass. Cats in ancient Egypt, trendy cats painted on shiny black-and-white tile floors. I eagerly comb my hair and find my wallet.

I couldn't stand the sight of the old man. Perhaps that was their idea of my hell. I hated his watery, colorless eyes, his gaunt cheekbones, the blue veins around his temples. I hated his wrinkles, age spots, and cracked lips. I took my mirror down. With no reminders, I almost forgot I was James Moran, retired Navy admiral, and go back to thinking I was Nate, star quarterback for the Irwin Wildcats.

By December, people stopped talking about me. I became a point in time, my suicide a quiet center of people's conversations. People explained that they had purchased a particular t-shirt at a particular store a little bit before Nate's suicide, a little bit after. They did the same thing with Yellowstone's floods. After the first few weeks, no one complained bitterly about the flood. People forgot the way it carried off their televisions like a muddy thief, the way it bleached the bottoms of their wooden table-legs, the way it chased them up the stairs. The tragic events in Irwin become a town calendar, remembered only to help organize the present, a time-line, a grid. When did your older daughter get married, Mrs.

Ewing? Oh, before the flood, a few years after that boy's suicide, Mr. Moran. I would've killed myself again for that: the loss of my name.

I am black point in people's memories. Karen's notes on molecular biology, to be memorized for a test on Friday, shadowed me into oblivion. Immediately after the suicide, I had been the thought to which people's minds kept returning, a star. By December, I had become a black hole.

I quit working at Irwin High and became a book collector. I collected books on two subjects: battleships and cats. I was a sucker for bright pictures and full-color photographs. Harmony told me on the phone that I had developed a lot of soul.

I love the sight of the streaking dawn so much I go to sleep after it, but I don't want to miss the mornings either. I like to be awake for the mail, to hear the clunk as it slides in the slot. I keep hoping I'll hear from an old lover. I love the twilight, the sounds the crickets make, the way Harmony's orange cat crawls up on my lap.

Sometimes when I worry too much about dying, about having to vote Republican, about what to do with the jars of English tea-bags the cleaning lady insists I like, I think about what comes after this. I can't imagine eternity. I can't imagine anything without an ending.

I map out possibilities of who I will be in my next life: Karen and Nick's third child, Harmony's cat's kitten, the football coach's only child, a daughter who won't like sports. If I am Karen's child I will whistle at her and thereby frighten her, mystify her, endear myself to her. I like this scenario best. Sometimes I think I will just become dust, gradually melt away to nothing, and there will be this unimaginable unconsciousness, a sleep, whatever there was before I was born.

*Kate Zangrilli*

# Summer

---

The year before I was born  
was the hottest summer here  
recorded to date, though  
the next after it was cool, or nearly,  
almost bordering on cold.

I used to run metal pieces like forks  
along a metal rim, pretending that  
I played a creaking violin or viola,  
sometimes even viola da gamba.  
It was to remind me  
of the cold and how the trees,  
leafy in the summer,  
might have been dull in the sharp blue sky  
before I could see.

I knew how to recall  
the fierce juxtaposition  
and the red nose I carried,  
even in the warmer hours.

The women during the  
summers, always warmer and warmer after that,  
wore fabulously high, high heels with their white skirts,  
walking next to their men,  
dwarfed in sneakers and loafers which didn't shine.  
I thought it was to let the shoes  
last longer, the heel being longer,  
wearing down, down, taking years  
to reach the flatness of my shoes,  
many summers until they wore through.

I secretly admired the shape

of legs in such built up shoes.  
I vowed that soon I would wear them,  
all year round, too,  
so long as the stilettos didn't snap  
like branches in the cold.  
The clip, quicker than most,  
of the thin heels on sidewalks  
reminded me of the crack of trees,  
in nipping weather and wind,  
whether in the summer months,  
or the winter ones.

*Kate Nesin*

# "I could smell Winter last night..."

I could smell Winter last night.  
The cold stream running from the Yukon  
Coming south to Banff and passing over Calgary  
Touching Montana, splitting the Twins  
Then falling south past Madison  
Reaching it's nadir in Chicago,  
It runs the Great Lakes into Detroit, Buffalo, and across  
The Empire State and into Massachusetts  
Up to my front door.

I could feel Winter this morning.  
I stepped out from the vitals of Bullfinch  
And like an unwelcome guest  
Breathing in your face  
Proclaiming his arrival, and his intent  
To stay.  
I flinched at first and closed my eyes  
To the flat glare piercing through the cloudy sky  
And I remembered the sound of trudging.  
The encapsulating effect of snow,  
Making your ears deaf to the world around you  
Except for the sound of watching your breath  
And listening to your steps cut through a thin layer of  
firn

Tomorrow it will be Winter.  
His subtle warnings, the changing leaves  
The hardened faces, the steps of walkers growing brisk.  
The happiness of the nearing holidays  
The depression of the pending holidays  
Two different things, two different meanings.  
Yes, Winter is coming, and the cold is upon us.

The earth is rolling on its side  
Making the days grow short, and the nights unrelenting.  
A sound sleep comes over us, as the hearth is cleaned.

*Derek Neatherly*



*Shivani Reddy*

## **“‘Scuse Me”**

---

I *said* I was sorry,  
dammit, told them I meant it,  
again and again to a monitor froze,  
alone while all hell  
filled up the pond again.

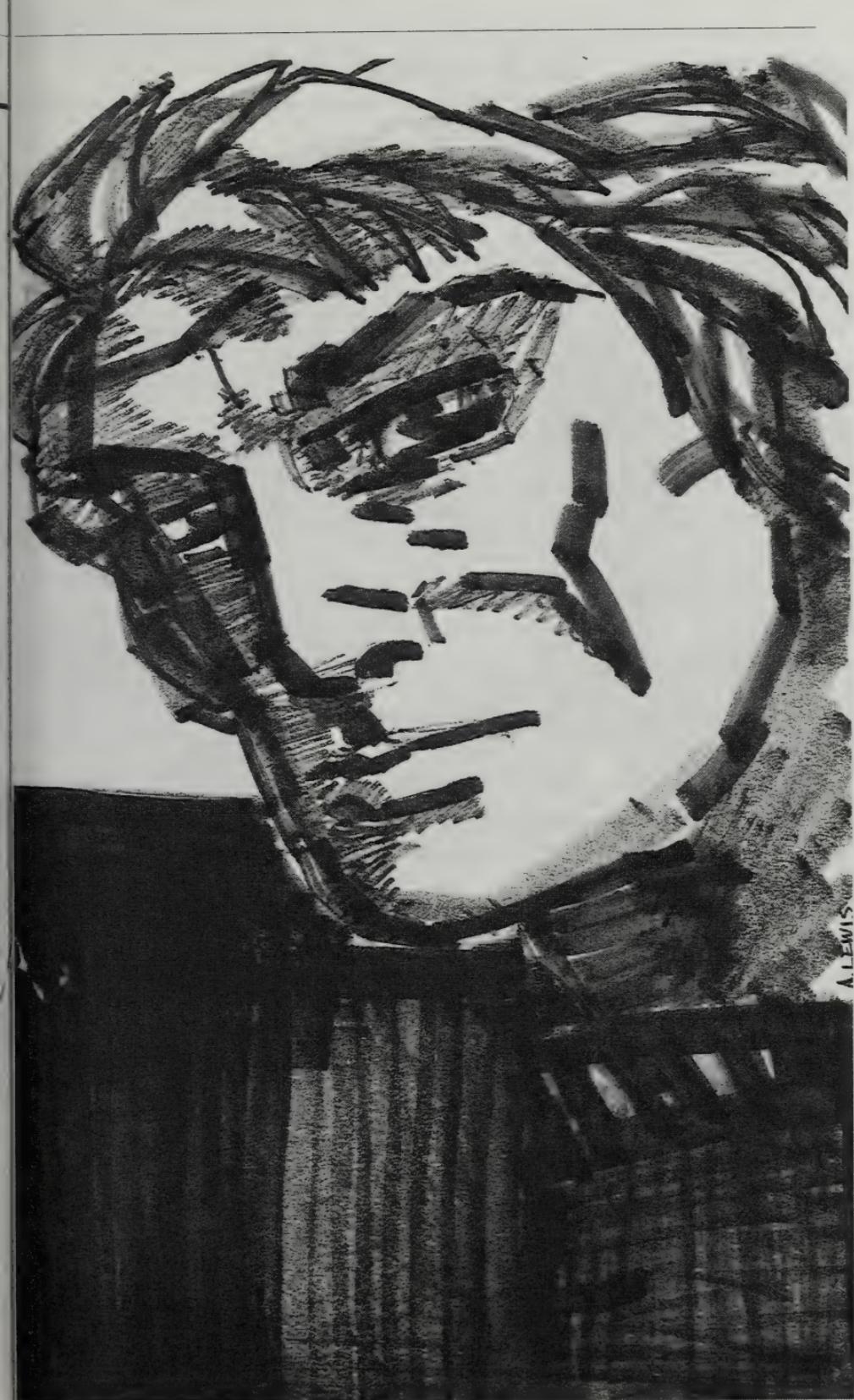
You see nothing. Neither did I.  
Said I was sorry. Said it again.  
Scared straight, I said  
to my ghost-limned friend,  
who hadn't asked. I said it to

men with teeth, in pickup trucks.  
I said it to the golden-haired, I said it to  
the black-haired, with their brass bands  
and guitars. I said it to the elfin men,  
the sweetest-voiced, the blackest-hearted,

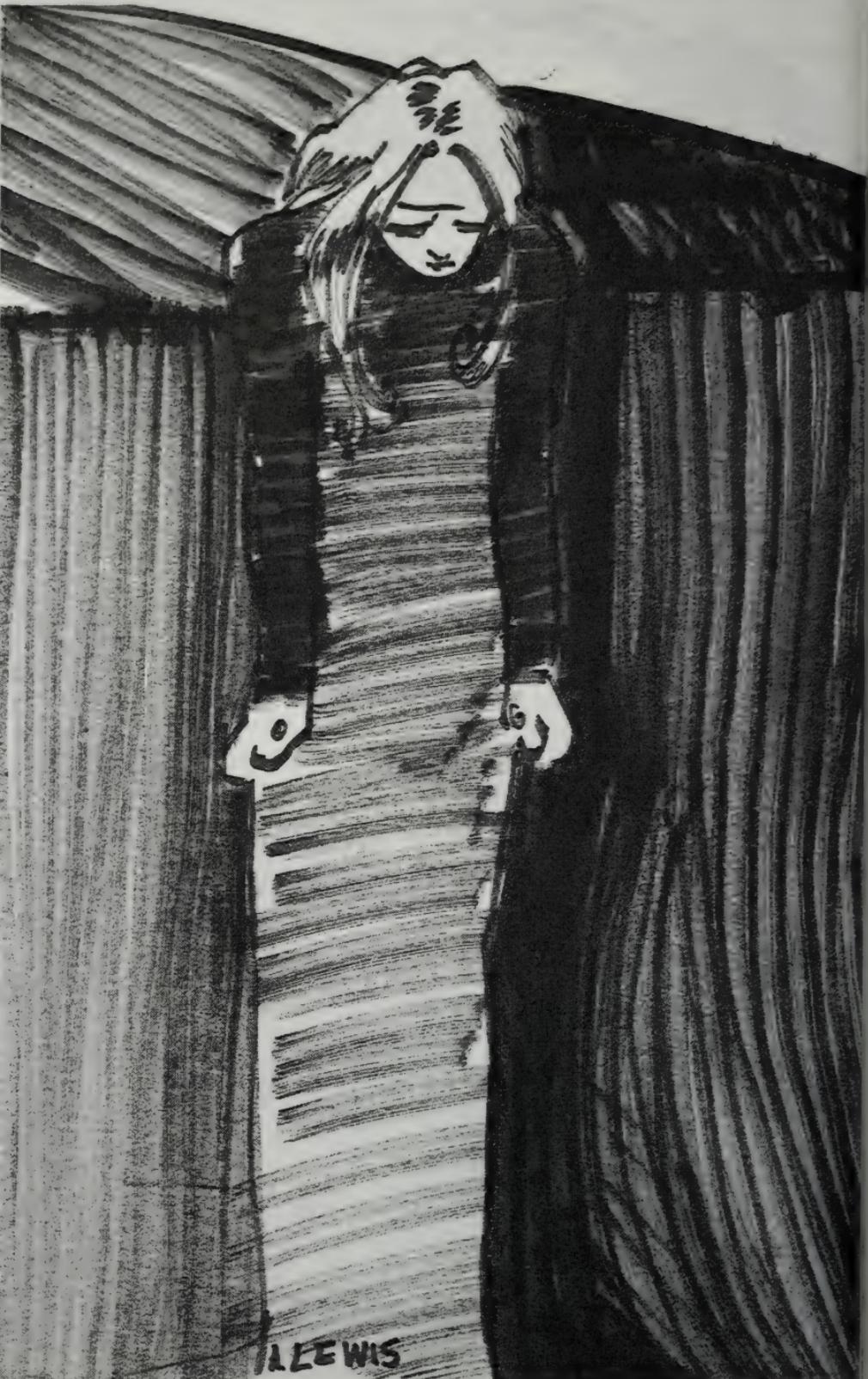
to the deafened and the kindly,  
to the dutiful most of all.  
To make a chant without a voice,  
to make a still-limbed shriving,  
I knit this out of sweat and fear.

Outside, in some tree's gnarled skirts,  
there rests a butter knife, no sign  
of rust, a peaceful sleep; safe, the evidence  
of some very tiny crime. All hell  
pours down around it; all that rain.

*Amy O'Neal*



*Alice Lewis*



*Alice Lewis*

# Our Perfect Hell

---

He had long, jet black hair. He had bleached it a long time before, so only the very ends of his hair were blonde. When I first met him, I couldn't tell if he was real or fake, heaven sent, or intrinsically evil. He reminded me of the devil. His name was Gabriel.

I knew Gabriel for exactly twelve hours. We spent the whole night together. He had a beautiful face, but his eyes spoke of something. Something that he knew and didn't want to know, something that he regretting ever having to face. That something was behind his eyes at every moment; it never left. Even when he was laughing and rolling on the floor, it lingered on. When he was lost inside his mind, seeing his visions, I could see his something lurking there behind the dust of his eyes. He didn't care to clarify his eyes to me, but he let me look into them and see what I could see.

Gabriel, Gabriel. He would spark his lighter in a completely dark place, highlighting his features. It was as if we were in hell and I face to face with the devil. I was alone, vulnerable to the enemy of all that I knew, the enemy that wanted to bring me down. And this enemy's name was apparently Gabriel. Then my friend would stir impatiently and whisper, "Will you hurry up, Gabriel?" Then he would smile and turn out the light, his little maniacal laugh overtaking us in the darkness. We emerged into the light, and on his face was the cutest expression. At that instant he was a baby squinting in the light. At that moment he was an angel, trying to guide us children to the safest place, right in front of the television.

In front of the television, on my friend's immense couch, we would lounge and naturally turn to MTV. With the sound muted and ICP blasting on the stereo, the music became a soundtrack to every crazy video. And in turn, ICP became the soundtrack to our lives. Everything we did was prerecorded on the Insane Cloud Posse's 'Wicked Clowns' songs. We all died, went to hell, and were in hell. We were in hell, watching TV in my friend's house, which was also in hell. This was true because it said so in ICP's lyrics. We were all convinced of this fact, and were perfectly content with it. None of us cared that we were in hell, because if this was hell, we were glad

that we had died together in my friend's house watching muted and soundtracked MTV.

Gabriel would give me the most wonderful backrubs. He would sit behind me and wrap his legs around me so that his feet were in my lap. His strokes would brush all the way through my body, reverberating down to my toes and out to my fingers. He rubbed my back to the beat of the soundtrack to our lives. He was an angel. Gabriel sat right in front of me, his face an inch away from mine, our noses touching. He wanted to see the color of my eyes, but the room was too dark. So we decided that it was his turn for a backrub, and that we wouldn't wake up our friends already asleep on the couch. Together, Gabriel and I made the perfect hell. the beat of the soundtrack to our lives

*Miriam Berger*

# Black Friday

---

the day  
my parents  
threw each other out  
the cats just slid  
under chairs  
and pretended  
they didn't know  
what was going on  
and throughout the morning  
it was dark, swelling  
with the earth  
scent, making itself  
fresh  
before rain

*Kate Zangrilli*



*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Four Walls

---

1. I'm sick of searching  
for what you've lost  
  
always finding it  
in the  
  
“goddamn! breadbox!”  
  
voices echo in the kitchen  
clash in static  
the radio mutters  
in distraction  
  
coming home  
the commuter rail  
rattles you gray  
as a fist.
2. you think of  
paper  
envy its smooth brow  
white as the sky, but  
windless  
  
you want to write a list  
of your grievances:  
  
your mother, leaning into your life like a cat  
your daughter, behind closed doors  
your husband, forgets  
your father, a void  
  
the sign in Trenton that said “the world takes.”

3. turn on the faucet and  
the pipes ring and knock  
throughout the house like  
a blind pinball machine:

he kicks you in his sleep.

rhinoceroid, cyclopic, lopsided  
stumbling forward  
all thumbs  
your body turns  
against you

you still have the scar  
he still "finds you attractive."

and standing  
at the bedposts  
in your housecoat, you

want to kick too

scald and blister  
rush,  
still red:

demanding to know why you  
were the one  
standing at the sink

when the water  
spurted out too  
hot and too  
fast.

# Crowned With Pink Compact

---

she was twirling like a doll  
on a music box  
those years, those months  
she woke every morning  
to spin in bed with  
185 pounds of man  
kissing the scrape of his moustache  
each pore pouring rough black  
and each lip a red roll of a slug.  
so 'Big He Little She'  
his stomach like a globe  
she could be swallowed  
and he would taste her  
their sheets routined and dry  
she loved him because he  
would be in control these times.  
and she could lie, patterned panties  
removed at the thigh.

*Caitlin Berrigan*

# 33rd Street

---

I have no remorse  
lover's, buyer's, seller's  
I have no regret  
morning, afternoon, night  
cause I have it all  
I got that memory of good living  
I got black showers  
and mother's eyes on the guy's prize  
and disconnected phones for smoke  
I got it all  
I got visine addiction  
and weird kisses past 7:00  
on the laps of pantyhose jack offs  
and emotional evidence on my neck  
and hot tub hallucinations  
and little deaths  
and awkward urges  
to want the world to enter me in rhythmic intervals  
and I got foreskin fumbles  
and mirror mooning  
and roof passion  
and homemade halter tops in the playground  
and agony  
over those lessened by destiny and speechless advice  
that somehow named me wise  
but I got it and I'm glad

*Caitlin Mulhern*

## 9 Years

---

choking on your pride  
wanting to strangle the ones  
who have mastered it  
obsessed with the obsession  
I can't practice 9-5  
I can't run fast enough  
I can't jump high enough

but I sure as hell  
know my feng shui  
better than half of those  
medal-winning midgets  
I sure as hell know  
my spanish like a madwoman

and that piano  
in the dark man  
I'm the parragon  
of nude midnights  
on stools  
in showers  
on diving boards  
I'm the one that won't forget me

*Caitlin Mulhern*

# Temporary

Temporary whistles  
wet lips wet  
the city air  
windless whistles

turgid, urgent  
dangles scrawny knees  
out the windows

dangles sticky  
pantyhose

her belly is fleecy  
her belly is cotton-raw and glossy

tongue flapping like a  
clothesline in the wind

stringy she and  
cotton-crotched

she likes to talk about the wind  
she likes to tell us where she's been

Funny baby!  
don't touch her: she's raw  
she'd bleed away  
without a kiss

I saw it once  
she broke her fingers on the door  
running out, tore her  
nightie ribbons and gums  
and blood blood blood  
welled up like strawberry blossoms

Rigorous and sour, she now  
swallows her milk teeth,  
pads along on her knees:

her nipple snapped  
a skin-lidded flap  
her heart  
beat away unperturbed

her fingers chapped  
callous-capped  
from trying to touch  
the fleeting world.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Heavenly Bodies

---

This park. In a suburb south of Boston. To the north is the shipyard, to the west is a wasteland infested with sumac and poison ivy, to the south is the Haggerty's backyard, and to the east, beyond a sparse brake, is Route 3-A.

1984: David Langelo threw the basketball a little too far at the annual neighborhood Field Day. The erratic motion in the corner of its eye spooked the little dapple gray pony that was giving rides to the legions of horse-crazy kids with no horses of their own. Elizabeth Foley, a lisping, Shirley Temple doll of a four year old was dragged two hundred yards by the galloping pony, her left foot caught in the stirrup, the rest of her hanging and bumping against the legs. She got a concussion and a lifelong horse phobia. The panic and disorientation of the moment, the smell of the horse, the sight of her own curls dragging in the sand and gravel and dead grass would be her earliest memory.

1985: David Langelo sprinted with the absolute power of pure terror through here. Chasing after him was a drunk bum from the shipyard. This bum had a knife. David had thought this crazy bum was his friend. He had been experimenting with running away, spending nights in cardboard boxes in the shipyard, and the bum gave him watered-down vodka. Elizabeth Foley won first prize in the Field Day costume contest. She was a fairy, wearing white tights, a green leotard, and gauzy wings that fluttered like eyelids in the June breeze.

1986: David Langelo smoked his first cigarette here, with the older Lennon brothers. The bum fell in love with Crazy Mary. At sleepover parties around the neighborhood, they say that if you say "Crazy Mary, Crazy Mary, Crazy Mary" before a mirror, at midnight, you will see blood splatter your reflected face . That is her revenge, they say. Elizabeth Foley and her friend Katie Haggerty found a bottle of clear Revlon nail polish in the bushes, cast away by Crystal Davidson. Elizabeth and Katie decide that this is the Wicked Witch of the West's magic potion. Elizabeth becomes convinced that she is Ozma of Oz; Katie believes that she is Dorothy.

1987: David Langelo smoked his five hundredth cigarette here, all Marlboros. The boy has his brand loyalty. The drunk bum joins AA, and Crazy Mary's cousin buys her a trailer. Elizabeth Foley and Katie Haggerty decide that Crazy Mary is the Wicked Witch of the West. Crystal Davidson meets an older guy, out of high school. He has a motorcycle and she says it feels like heaven riding on it, everything blur and wind and noise, 'til it tips over and gives her a nasty burn on her leg. Her mother asks what the burn is from; Crystal can't think of any lies but the truth, so her mom finds out about the older boyfriend and kicks her out of the house. It's an ugly scene; all the neighbors call Mrs. Davidson to find out what happened. Crystal spends the night alone in the park, under the jungle gym shaped like an octopus. The next day, Mrs. Davidson takes Crystal back.

1988: David Langelo wrote "I Love You Crystal I Love You" in the sand of the baseball diamond here. Crystal saw it the next day and wondered and wondered who on earth wrote it. The bum never drank anymore; he and Crazy Mary lived out some odd, sweet/sad parody of normal life together in their trailer. Elizabeth Foley and Katie Haggerty threw pebbles and acorns at Crazy Mary, the Wicked Witch of the West. She chased them down and slapped them, hard. Crystal Davidson lost one of her diamond stud earrings; she doesn't know it, but it's still here, waiting in the grass around the octopus-jungle gym. Mrs. Davidson volunteered to lead Brownie Troop No. 4811. The shipyard went out of business, what with government cut-backs and all.

1989: David Langelo started a habit of coming down here around twilight, sitting on the swing set, barefoot, and writing angst poetry, mostly about Crystal and the tragedy of unrequited love. Crystal left home; the older boyfriend proposed to her here, as they sat on the basketball court looking up and tracing the constant paths of the heavenly bodies and constellations. She said yes and they bought a starter house over in Hull. It is the happiest year of her life. The bum and Crazy Mary died; Crazy Mary sprinkled gasoline over everything—the trailer, the cats, the bum, herself—and struck a match. The Crazy Mary sleepover myth spread throughout the town, beyond the confines of the neighborhood. Elizabeth Foley

and Katie Haggerty had a fight, yelling and kicking and screaming. They will eat on opposite sides of the cafeteria for the rest of elementary school, and all through middle and high school as well. Mrs. Davidson embezzled several thousand dollars of Girl Scout Cookie money—she made quite a profit, because one of her Brownies, Michelle Lennon, played the part of Cosette in the Boston production of *Les Misérables* at the Wang. Professional actors, it seems, have an unusual craving for Thin Mints, and they all bought dozens from her. The Girl Scouts of America do not press charges, fearing the accompanying publicity and besmirching of their image.

1990: David Langelo's visiting grandmother broke her ankle. She was just sitting on the swing here, but the chain was rusty to the point of disintegration; the swing collapsed and so did she, landing on her ankle funny. Elizabeth Foley decided she was too old to come here anymore. So had Katie Haggerty. Mrs. Davidson left town; the evil looks everyone was giving her got to be too much to put up with. Michelle Lennon and her parents moved out to L.A. to pursue her acting/modeling career. She appeared in a TV movie, playing a girl who is kidnapped and murdered by some psychopath.

1991: David Langelo kissed Elizabeth Foley after giving her a ride on the motorcycle he bought from Crystal's husband. Katie Haggerty told everyone at school the next day so Elizabeth is a slut. The incident was the middle school gossip of the year—David was seventeen and Elizabeth was eleven. Afterwards, they never went to the park together, where Katie could see from her window. Now they go to the cemetery, or the hill near the harbor, where Elizabeth says the salt breeze makes the blades of grass flutter like eyelids.

*Anne Borneuf*

# Graduation: Hurling Through the Rite of Passage

---

A whole year early—premature—  
(a whole whorl of the zodiac)  
    a year early and she left,  
her diamond-white cap whirring on her crown  
    (later to be pearled with mothballs,  
a toy for her tiny brown children)  
running her shellfish-melon manicured digits  
over the laminated certification, embossed with her name  
    uplifted black letters  
and roping signatures belying across the bottom;  
how that sharp gold seal like a triumphant face  
    spat  
“Eureka!” into the frowning creases of her mother’s brow.

Escaped.  
They all mutter how rapidly she wanted to grow up  
    —premature—  
from the size of an apricot-cheeked Ginny Doll to: this  
white-feathered-17-matron housing accents of  
    car shows, drop-outs, baby photos, blonde curls...  
eyeliner heavy as tar, early marriages and thread-thin styles  
    (alcohol cut down the back throats  
    of men)  
burgundy-black sugar koolaid.

I sparkle amid all my dark in the rows behind her.  
Somehow this stage, this audience, these butched haircuts  
    and  
    these mustard acrylic curtains  
have transported us to the 1950s  
the metallic gloss of the malfunctioning microphone  
and the butterfly purr of the blue programs

airing the sticky faces of 500 restless people.  
She is a name among the white and green zombies,  
her split-faced grin the same worn smile  
she strapped on her mouth throughout the  
—premature— years.

I remember her: wet and smelling of Aloe Vera,  
smooth olive hands snapping me into a whore's costume  
(the monkey-bottom red swelling my lips)  
and through her sour-pitted, grinding affection of nice  
young woman,  
we all tucked our crossed-fingers beneath our laps,  
tried to clap and hoot away our fears and doubts  
as we beamed, beamed, beamed.

*Caitlin Berrigan*

# A Travelling Man: Elijah McCoy

Elijah McCoy's feet never met with the steaming-kettle pavement or the toadstools and scratchy weeds that gave you warts and made you crazy as he walked the winding path of rusty trestle on his way to Lorna's Fine Roadhouse and Supperclub. On his way, town faded into empty warehouses that smelled of dying dust and the large wooden crates that could only be opened by super-heroes after their spinach or spaghetti-o's. The way was lined with the skeletons of many dandelions, whose wishes the wind whispered away.

Elijah would sit out many of the great hazes of summer at his lemonade stand in the grey fold-up chair that was the same color as Tommy Bennet's braces, behind his cardboard sign that calmly announced:

Lemonade and Fortunes Told  
50 cents each  
Respectively.

It was an easy job. The rich folks from Leighton Way or Acorn Street would take their pristine wives out of their boxes and giggle superiorly to each other at the poor, little moppet asking them to spare a bit of change. Elijah gyppe the money was good too, and itoo little of it in the Dixie cups, or he gave them the lukewarm stuff with no ice in it or maybe with a dead fly floating around in it and if they asked their fortune, he would tell them they'd live in a whale with Captain Caveman for all he cared. But their money was good too, and it quickly went into the jam jar where he kept his money good for a chocolate milkshake at Lorna's each Friday night.

Teenagers on dates would look at him hopefully, asking him to pass a verdict on their budding romances and would tip him a brand new nickel if he were to agree with their way of seeing it.

Sometimes some of the crazy guys would come, the ones with beards down to their bony knees that he could bet were home to colonies of ants, things that were missing from the lost-and-found box at school, and even a couple of animals they swore were extinct

a long time ago. Elijah was careful with them, he didn't tell them a cute little story about marshmallow dinosaurs and living happily ever after, or what he knew they wanted to hear. He tried to really see them, and tell them, for what it was worth, the truth.

Each Friday afternoon, he would fly up his front steps, past the dirty diapers and shattered whiskey bottles, and dump his empty lunch box and penmanship papers on his mattress and then he would go to the dump. It was all chaos, all the kids banging on barbecue grates and car fenders with their fists and running headfirst into anything of dirt and liberation from the impossibly long week of school. Elijah would sit, invisible to everyone, on the mustard and red-checked sofa with springs and fluff bubbling up all over, to count his earnings and nearly every other week he would have come up with, by some neat miracle, the \$1.50 Lorna required.

Lorna's was the best place. The stools sprung up like the weeds and wildflowers and hedge-plants that fenced in his school playground, and had real, squishy leather cushions, and spun around like a flying-saucer on the take-off. The counter was lined with chrome and was so clean and chaste, that the travelers who took in her homefries, chili con carne, and brewed pots of tea, would use its mirrors to pick their teeth on the sly.

*Mary Ziegler*

# A Travelling Man: Hey Mister

"Hey, Mister, have you ever heard of a flying machine?" Elijah asked the man who sat next to him at the counter of Lorna's Fine Roadhouse and Supperclub. Elijah knelt unstably on the twisty stools, to reach over the candy-striped straw in his chocolate milkshake.

"Where would you ever want to go that you couldn't get to on foot?" the man asked him.

"Over there," he said as he walked over to the screened window, covered in June's early dew and the legs of perched mosquitos and biting elephant flies who waited for you to come out. Elijah pointed to the mountains that bordered the town, mountains the color of the Concord Grape Jelly you received with toast at diners. "I figure there has to be somewhere better than here in town. Places with meadows full of seashells and real roses and marigolds and dust from the stars, and places where there are wild horses that bust through barbed wire and whatever else they please and places where there are real, nice people like in the books of nursery rhymes at school." Elijah slurped up some milkshake and made wild animal noises with his straw. "So do you believe in flying machines? That there could be one, I mean?"

"Maybe soon there will be. I sure wish there was one for me," the man said bitterly without realizing.

"Oh, so you're a traveling man?"

The man smiled between gulps of his cup of hot tomato soup and soggy croutons. "Well, I guess I am."

"What's it like, Mister?"

"There are sunsets better than anywhere and they're all for you. The bugs and fireflies get more like giants the later it gets. There are no doorbells to ring and no one is around to cut the grass or tell you what's a weed or a flower. Everything is always open, and at night packs of werewolves and bogeyman your parents tell you are pretend are all sleeping under the same sky as you. It makes you lonely though, lonely all the time."

"It wouldn't be lonely if you had a friend, would it Mister, a

fellow traveling man?"

"I'm sure I couldn't tell you, really."

"If someone were to say, give you their lemonade collection  
money or from selling Girl Scouts, would you mind taking them?"

"Only if they were a friend."

"Well, Mister, you and I are going to be great friends."

*Mary Ziegler*



*Caitlin Berrigan*

# Sequential

---

It started upon completion of his ascent to the North Country, and he emerged from the navy auto to suck down that air, the sharp pang of purity that rushed down his throat, carved a cavern in his chest and climaxed in a brilliant sunburst within his lungs.

He watched the sunset that night, like so many nights before eased into his brain with orange haze.

And he let that record clean his ears and (you know how it goes) commenced

How it was! The cool mornings and the vividness with which the velocipede wore a vein into the road. And his limbs were spinning circles like his head so many times before and road rose with the waves and caressed his tires and it all unfolded before the radial inertial pattern of his spokes (the gears grow into the ground and June goes in the jaundice glow)

You saw his hands, marred terminally by mechanics' milk. He wrenched, and he sweat in his brown boots. The machines would hardly roll and he excelled resolving mechanical trifles. The hairless blanched side of his forearm had a light dusting of potent black pollen-it highlighted his erupting veins, tiny midnight rivers on his muscle. His thumbs were worn bald, no ridges, but man, those wheels would roll, and they'd run off on a thousand

adventures round and true. And that made him happy, see.

And there was the giant diaspora of  
human transmission that cascaded off the  
pine panel shelves. The wee wandering notes  
bleating from the speakers beside the mound of bound  
    parcels of  
words. The bookcase integrated  
into the house, the wood and its tiny ripples of tawny  
that make FACES AT YOU  
AND THEY CONFUSE YOU YES THEY DO

And the house, oh that solid trunk  
with a mere 2 panes of glass (through who  
you see to the lake you do) and an assembly  
of stones that, 50 years before, were plucked dripping  
from the cool waters and dragged up to warm him  
and form for him his house which housed  
His Mighty Brain (it did)

And ooh when sun went down  
and night got cold, I'm told  
he ran to the ga-rage, to  
drum (boom boom)-  
let it all spill out in perfect time and rhythmic rhyme  
and swing  
boom- and swing he would  
and OH HOW SWEET!  
THE BEATING HANDS, THE DROPPING FEET!  
He laid it out like a golden street  
and rolled  
    (his rhythms out)

The new screen door  
crafted by his uncle the carpenter. Even if  
he eased it shut, the door would conjure a deep

oriental sound, crashing in a subtle swoosh at contact with the house.

And there were things he didn't like so much.  
Like the neighbor he had never noticed,  
who slaughtered his beach, severing the fallen trees  
that had been placed there by nature and her nourishing  
erosion.

There was the monstrous hut of unnatural color reamed  
into the earth up the beach, the alien green fields  
constructed for trivial games (for trivial drunken  
businessmen),

and the drab drone of invading watercraft.

BEASTS ARE EATING UP THE LAND LIKE SO  
MUCH MEAT  
KILL TREES WITH THEIR AUTOS, KILL FISH  
WITH THEIR FLEET

But let us not dwell on such gloom.  
We still have this day, the late summer  
breeze that sends the blue mass squirming,  
the raven gliding, our sweat crystallizing into an  
earthy phosphorescence, our matted ground giving with  
each gentle caress, the roof snapping at the smattering  
of an acorn (whose home has just been lost), the  
velocipedes  
at rest like every particle in this place-  
the point in our existence that is wholly real.

*Will Glass*

# Portrait of the Wilderness

---

Chain-saws silence, blue light of evening steals between the trees, and late forest workers hurry back to their isolated harbors of warmth.

Trees thrash uncannily, dancing a limbo to the last fingers of sunlight fading in the face of a biting wind. A vole melts against the shadow of a tree trunk, jerking its head in nervous spasms. The wing beat of an owl makes it freeze, nose twitching, it backs slowly towards a bush and dives down a hole.

A child turns on a creaky bed-frame, twisting the warm sheets around small limbs in a dream. The door bangs loosely.

Twigs crack among dense trees, grass in the clearing flattens in the wind. A skinny cat slides into the shadow of a shed and the scream of a chicken, frantic flutter of feathers, shatters the quiet. Sleek orange shape steals off to devour its prize.

Age, brooding, sits quietly by the hearth filled with charred embers, rubbing knobby hands in slow friction for warmth. Looks tiredly at flintlock rifle.

Far away, a young couple sit up late in their own small cabin, fending off the chill of the encircling trees with the warmth of company.

Shutters slam, the wind howls out a lonely tune, shrieking into the emptiness. Slashing rain pelts isolated cabins in icy torrents, and an old man sits quietly as a child rolls over onto the orange cat at her side.

*Kim Ballard*

# Dancing Blindfolded

---

Thoughts of absolute permanence  
Crashing down a thousand miles from the lake  
Where hopes live and dreams die  
In the primary spark of belief in the performance  
And the red, red dream

*Andrea Campbell*

# Whirl

---

Spins with  
the dancing madness  
of long swirling  
arms and the  
giddiness that comes  
with the dawn  
                            whirl  
                            tell the story of  
                            fairy winds and  
dusty nights where breath  
becomes a mystery and  
                            night sings effervescent  
                            songs  
                            crack the silver  
                            fog with laser long stream  
                            sings with golden inertia  
                            exaltation longing notes  
                            gilded words  
                            spill  
                            the touch of  
                            years out your pink  
                            mouth and dream eyes  
red dawn and silver moon meld  
                            and she whirls.

*Julia Magnus*

# Soul Clap Its Hands and Sing

As reality fell away  
his touch became an abstraction  
A dancer chained  
to the strict meter of time  
preparing for the moment  
when the music stops  
and the dance, released,  
goes on.

*Katharine Gilbert*

# The Watchtower Man

---

Whom does the watchtower man spy,  
Go that I may, to him and see,  
And glance into his face, his eye,  
His mind, his soul, to see beauty.

While he, returning my gay stare,  
Looks into me, and can but light  
The soul, made but of shame, I bear;  
Then he, knowing me, blesses his sight.

The guilt, the blemish just left me,  
Tries too, but is damned to fail,  
Cursing my cold eternity;

Back turned, mind on wealth and grail,  
Soul seeing both, it chooses the cross,  
Against the body, which blessedly lost.

*Chris Meserole*



*Kate Nesin*

# Palizado

---

It appears like a wheel of bullets,  
this fence of pales, monoliths like bunched beans,  
snow peas, huddling the fires and food.  
Armies in an aerial view, rings of spears and arms,  
make a lens, round like the glass ones  
on those plastic cameras, images from  
the Empire State Building, looking down, so clean and  
clear.

There are coiled bodies, knots of faces,  
spear-heads reminding like hands, ready match heads,  
giant stirring spoons.  
“Fire sticks” is a direct translation.  
The men outside, circling formation,  
and the others around the fires, face  
the shady hills with their round lenses.

From farthest away, it could be a bull’s eye,  
the home-and-fire-middle a smooth red target.  
The bullet-wheel shifts and opens to the north and south:  
repeating the blunt figures, circles,  
the match-spears, miniatures, like the bodies and the  
spoons,  
everything else, the trees that shade  
the shady hills are short, blunt crosses  
from this distance.

Captains Underhill and Mason are in,  
entered from opposite sides;  
musket-fire ballooning from their sticks, they are  
standing  
in the compass openings, erect.

The Pequot War, we are told,

set the tone for racial politics, and in 1637,  
Underhill was called a hero; there are paintings of him  
in photographs in books.  
His features are big, clean, and clear.

The straw roofs and doors  
are standing up like fires, and they equal in height  
the muskets by themselves or the bushy crosses  
on all sides, a height now allowed  
above or below the ground.

*Kate Nesin*



*Orion Montoya*

# Redemption

---

Old Burnie  
Planting his crosses  
Across the West Virginia countryside  
Like poison ivy  
Strewn about-  
Groups of three,  
Making me itch  
Old Burnie  
Holier-than-thou  
Trying to relieve all that  
Damn Guilt.

*Sara Bright*



*Kim Ballard*

# The Ringleader

---

Many cross the seas,  
To blast humanity.

But now is the time to disregard the morals we have  
preached so hard.

The Powerful will stumble.  
On the Fall they'll claw our knees.  
Step on up and feed me all your worries and disease.  
I'm your wax wing dealer -  
I won't sell it - it's all free.  
Step on up and feed me all your worries and disease.

In lonely times and trials,  
It's service with a smile.  
For feeling down and feeling weak -  
In any form that you may seek.  
With my hand I lead the meek:  
Those for whom life cannot keep.  
The Scarred, the Sore, the Raped, the Mauled -  
The time has come to feed them all.

The Powerful will stumble.  
On the Fall they'll claw our knees.  
Step on up and feed me all your worries and disease.  
I'm your wax-winged dealer -  
I won't sell it - it's all free.  
Step on up and feed me all your worries and disease.

Forty years to Life per vile  
Of my Mindless Anarchy.  
Step right up and feed me all your worries and disease.

## Number 24

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He arrived with the drunkards  
(who were meeting up with more)  
and upon entering he was encountered  
by a young girl.

She looked at him with eyes that were big  
and beautiful and she had made them red and big  
and he didn't think she knew it was him -  
but his Convictions rendered him  
useless to her and he  
suggested that his friend might be more of a sport  
for what she was interested in.

(He's not much of a sport  
for he refrains. In his own way  
he only try to keep others from  
having the fun that he doesn't have.)

And so deeper into the sins and smells and smoky sorts  
and upon a couch he found resort -  
but another girl with similar  
eyes deemed it necessary to sit on him -  
not a problem  
but SHE might object.

But taking into account that he objects to HER  
He let the weary lass enjoy her seat  
away from seats with OTHER motives.  
He hadn't seen his company for while -  
he bet himself that they were  
off somewhere and he won five bucks  
that neither of them had.

So to the ivories he slid  
and brushed the boy off

(The boy was in a less than conscious state and didn't  
seem to be  
appreciating it as the fine piece of musical  
instrumentation that he found it to be.)

So he plays.  
And they listens.  
And he hates it when they do that:  
“Play this!” and “Play that!”  
“Play it your damn drunk self,” he wants to say  
But he refrains.  
It’s just his way.

“Then remarks were made.  
And he didn’t want to listen  
And the band it played.  
And he kind of wished he’d stayed”  
But he’s glad he didn’t.

*Nathan Hetherington*

# Mr. Crane's Refrigerators

"Richard! You didn't stay in the cellar all night again, did you?" Mrs. Crane yelled down the basement steps. Richard Crane had slept downstairs on an old mattress for the past week because the refrigerators had wanted him to. A few months before, he had worn the same clothes for eight straight days when Major, the fridges' appointed leader, had complimented them.

On his mattress, Crane yawned, stretched, then dragged himself upright. A blanket lay to one side. He had thrown it off three nights ago, when the fridges had decided to keep him warm with their motors, and forgotten to pick it up. Crane wondered how they, all very intelligent, couldn't ever figure out how much warmth he actually needed, and usually kept whirring away through the night until he woke up sweating. He stood, then walked wordlessly up the stairs and into the shower. After getting dressed he ate breakfast standing against the kitchen counter.

"Richard!" his mother yelled from somewhere else in the house. "Where are you?"

"In the kitchen," he replied. He heard her steps padding along the carpeted hall and prepared himself for another talk.

"You know, it isn't healthy for you to spend all your time down there. You'll probably get sick from the dampness after a while."

"It isn't damp," Richard said quietly. He hated these conversations. His mother wanted him to say anything but what he knew to be true. "The refrigerators keep things warm."

"Now they're making sure you're comfortable," she said with incredulous flatness. "Richard, I really wish that you would try to find some kind of work. There are much better things for you to be doing than spending your time around a collection of old refrigerators."

"This is my vocation. You remember how they always used to talk about vocations in church, and how you used to tell me that I should do whatever made me happy, because that's what God intended me to do? This is it. I'm helping people much more than I would as a carpenter or a veterinarian."

"I meant a job, for God's sake! I meant that if you wanted to be a bricklayer, be a bricklayer. Or if you wanted to start some kind of store or neuter cats, go right ahead. Something useful."

"Haven't I explained to you that I'm trying to save humanity?"

"Don't give me that garbage. Think about it, Richard. I fed you, clothed you, I was about to pay your way through college if you hadn't started this fridge nonsense a month before you were supposed to leave for school. After your father died I worked to make sure that you'd have a chance at all that. And you repay me by filling my basement with junk refrigerators and leaching off me. You don't even act like a son. You don't help, you hardly talk to me except when forced, and you sit down there talking with a pile of kitchen appliances. Pushing the stupid things around, practically making dents in the basement floor. If you weren't my son I'd have you arrested."

"They've told me over and over again that they aren't happy, that no refrigerator is happy. Major, the old one you put down there when we bought the new one, almost killed me. I convinced him not to, and that I'd help him if he let me go. He explained how he was unhappy living as a slave to humans, and that he wanted to start an uprising. I told him that I would help them..."

"Just stop right there! I've made an appointment with a therapist for this afternoon, and if you don't go you'll have to find somewhere else to live. I'm ending this discussion right here. Now go try and do something useful with yourself."

Richard walked out of the kitchen, leaving a half-eaten slice of toast sitting on his plate, and opened the door to the basement. He went quietly down the steps, since he wasn't sure if any of the fridges were still asleep. Major rumbled at him as he reached the foot of the stairs. The seventies-style Amana clomped noisily across the floor, asking Richard how he was. On the way, he kicked Al, a heavyset deep freeze, to wake him up.

"All right," Richard replied.

Al jokingly punched Major in the handle, which he hated. Crane considered him the most intelligent of the 17-fridge group - he *had* been the first one to envision the Revolution - but was un-

nerved by his unbending seriousness, the shell of intensity he lived in. No matter how much Richard prodded him, Major refused to learn a single dance step, even ones that the others had long ago mastered. He enjoyed books, so over the years Crane had transferred his entire bookcase downstairs, and was especially interested in George Orwell. Major had named himself after the pig revolutionary in Animal Farm; he liked the parallel.

Major responded to Al by smacking him on his door, which opened from the top, and grunting angrily. Crane had always wondered exactly how they were able to hit each other, because they had no real limbs besides their handles. He guessed that maybe they used something like telepathy. They could do real damage when they were angry, too. Years ago, Crane had seen two fridges get into a fight, each emerging with its body covered in dents. Major had kicked both of them out of the group afterward.

The fridges gathered in a semicircle around Major. He began with his usual rumble, making sure that they were all awake. Their language was made up of regular refrigerator noises, meaning that to most people, the meeting would have sounded like a lot of air conditioners badly in need of repair being hit repeatedly with a hammer. Richard had no idea why he was able to understand them, but he was thankful that he could.

Every one of them was awake. Major started, "Today, if you remember, is the anniversary of my attack on Richard Crane, which is how we all came to be gathered in his basement. This is a day we must always remember, as it marks the beginning of the Revolution's first stage. I have thought deeply since we first moved here, about the future of us and our brethren, and also of humanity. Originally, I viewed our current situation as an unwelcome delay, but now I understand that, next to the Uprising itself, it is possibly the most important part of the Revolution. In this basement we have gained a culture, something before exclusive to humanity. I had thought that this could be a preview of a new cooperative era between human and refrigerator, but unfortunately it is not. Despite Richard's efforts, humans continue to regard us as slaves, as dumb appliances created by them simply for their use. They will not listen to reason, they refuse to coexist with us as equals. Therefore, we shall not strive

for equality but for dominance. We will fight, we will win, and humanity will fall. Richard Crane and all those like him will live among us, not as humans but as fellow refrigerators in a world of equality. This is our Revolution, and let it begin today!"

The other 16 immediately cheered, and began to stomp up and down on the floor. Crane felt sick to his stomach. It was too late, he could do nothing. His mother opened the door and shouted, "Your appointment's in 45 minutes!" She paused. "Could you stop that noise?"

Crane groaned, then replied, "Sorry, I can't. I'll be up in a minute." He turned to Major and mouthed, "I've got to go, all right." Major opened his freezer door a little, which Crane understood to mean yes.

His mother gave him the psychiatrist's address and he tried to explain things once more to her. "Do you remember that video of the refrigerators I showed you? How I translated their speech, how it was all about revolt? It's happening now."

"Richard, please just go to the doctor's." His stomach sank, but he went out the door quietly and drove off toward Boston. Crane felt nauseated every time he passed a car and saw its driver's face. In a few days they all might be dead, he thought. He had failed. Arriving at the parking garage, he was thankful that he didn't have to face a human ticket taker. At the office, the receptionist directed him right away to Dr. Anderson's room. Crane sat down in an easy chair and waited for the doctor. He entered the room a few minutes later, leafing through a stack of notes, then sat in a chair opposite Crane.

"Hello, I'm David Anderson."

Crane stuck out his hand. "Richard Crane."

"Nice to meet you. I just want to ask a some questions. I've read a few notes concerning your situation, so I have an idea of why you're here. Do you want to say anything first?"

"Well... I have 17 very angry refrigerators in my basement. They're on the verge of revolt at the moment."

"You have *what* many of them in your basement?" Dr. Anderson asked, taken aback. He was used to some interesting patients, but what Richard Crane said was, even for a psychiatrist, odd.

"Seventeen disgruntled iceboxes. I had eighteen until last winter, when Penny died."

"Your wife?"

"Are you crazy, doctor? I wouldn't marry if somebody paid me. Penny was one of them; a little old and worn down, but I still loved her. She was vintage fifties, your mother probably had a refrigerator just like her, with those big bulging doors and chrome fittings." Crane wiped a tear from underneath one eye. Penny's death had been hard enough for him then, but now, six months later, once he had been able to really think about it, her passing hurt him even more. He knew grief was a selfish emotion- his mother had told him that many times when older relatives passed away- but he was unable to discard it. Even now, with the knowledge that the man in front of him was as good as dead, he couldn't get it out of his mind.

"I know this may seem a mite inconsiderate, abrupt, but I like to use a first session to get a good overview of my patient. I'd like some facts about you and your condition, the real reason you came here."

"My mother made the appointment."

"Your mother is very worried about you. She says that you're delusional. Now..."

"I should have guessed before. She wants the basement, she doesn't care about them, their needs, how they must be treated. Don't cut me off, doctor! I'd rather be at home with my refrigerators, doing something useful. A refrigerator is a wonderful appliance, the noblest of any kitchen. Where would we be without a refrigerator? Yet we show them no gratitude. They're going to revolt! It'll be like the Bolsheviks in Russia. They are about to rise up, and who will stop them? Nobody. The truth is, power lies not with us but with the refrigerators who allow us to subsist. I decided to show them proper respect, to reward their sacrifices. I have a conscience, Doctor, my conscience forbids slavery, and how else are the refrigerators held but as slaves. I taught them to dance. They have already made excellent progress- a few can waltz, slowly and clumsily, but with promise. I am giving them *culture*. A dancing refrigerator is a happy one, and what's more it keeps them fit. When a

refrigerator is good and strong it keeps its contents much colder, and actually requires less electricity.”

“So you’re training them to be better refrigerators?”

“No, no. Of course not. I’m trying to keep them from killing us all. One of them attacked me 5 years ago, and told me that he planned to lead a refrigerator revolt against humanity. I convinced him to wait, that I would gather a group of refrigerators and help them, and at the same time I would convince people that they deserved better treatment. I did gather 17 refrigerators in my basement, and I did help them, but I was unable to convince a single human being that they are our equals. So this morning Major, their leader, the one who tried to kill me, spoke to them and set the Revolution in motion.

Crane paused, sitting back down. He had stood in front of it, gesturing and pushing his face almost into Dr. Anderson’s. The doctor spoke: “Mr. Crane, may I please ask you a few more questions?”

“No, you may not! I’m leaving now, and before I go I’ll say one more thing: I have tried to save you all, but I could not turn the tide alone. Perhaps there is still a way to forestall the Revolution, if we teach them all how to dance, give them some reward. Maybe the solution is that simple: until all the world’s refrigerators dance happily, the Revolution is inevitable. But, that will not happen. Humanity has already proved itself too stubborn for reason. They will remember me. I will watch safely, tolerated as the one human who gave them what they deserved, while refrigerators everywhere dance their oppressor, humankind, begging mercy beneath. Good bye doctor.”

*Nathan Littlefield*

## Snapshots of the Past

As a child, he was slight, with gangly arms and overly long legs that were the subject of many jokes among his schoolmates. He lived with his family in a moderately large house in Marshfield, which his mother kept decorated with somber furniture and heavy pictures. People often remarked that the place had the feel of a colonial museum.

"Cory," his mother called him from the kitchen. He finished scratching out the last sentence of his homework, capped his pen carefully, and rose to go to the kitchen. "You should be in bed by now. It's past ten." Cory had expected her to say this, and was ready with his usual vain plea. But she hustled him off to his room, saying he would be tired the next day and it wouldn't be her fault.

He changed slowly, dreading the large bed and tightly stretched sheets that felt like a tomb. Cory stood at the window a long time, looking out onto the field that was now misty and indistinct in the moonlight, and telling himself that tonight when he got into bed it would not happen, that he would go straight to sleep. But he knew it would happen anyway.

He climbed under the covers carefully, scrunching his eyes up tightly and trying to focus on what had happened that day. But it didn't help; his mind went to work like a mechanical clock stubbornly set in its ways, and the tears slithered from his eyes as the thought of death crept through his mind. Unable to stop his rambling mind in the lonely darkness, he thought with terror of how someday, quite soon in the reckoning of grown-ups, his parents would die and leave him alone in the world. And then he would die someday also, become unconscious forever. Forever seemed like a long time in Cory's mind; too long. And then sometime much later when he had been gone a long long while, the sun would burn itself out and the whole universe would disappear and there would be nothing. But "nothing" was too big a concept for Cory's mind to grasp, and so most of his reckoning stopped there and began over again, wracking his body with shivers of terror.

Morning stole into the room, creeping with light fingers

over the tangled bedcovers where Cory's small body lay sprawled in sleep. Jerry opened one eye and then shut it again tightly, trying to snatch a minute more of sleep before facing the tiresome prospects of the day. But the sun won the battle, prying under his eyelids and forcing him to roll over and stretch, and then rise to draw back the large curtains, a full admission of defeat.

Cory squinted out of the window casement and watched his dog rolling around in the dew-soaked grass. The day was going to be hot. He dressed quickly and stomped down the stairs. Becca, his older sister, was already having breakfast. "You're late. Go wake up Jeff." Jeff was thirteen, the middle child, and two years older than Cory. He never got up without being yelled at. Cory clambered back up the stairs and opened Jeff's door. "It's past seven. Get up." Jeff opened his eyes blearily and frowned.

"Get out of my room - and don't tell me what to do."

"Get up," Cory said, and left the room.

"Jeff. Cory. Come on!" Becca was calling them from the school playground. "Let's go!" She ran off ahead towards the Cleary estate where they played every day after school. It had been deserted for a long while, and they were free to roam among the towering beech trees, swinging from the limbs and dropping into the scraggly grass. Huge lawns surrounded the ruins of an old house of which only piles of lumber now remained. They climbed up on these, peering into holes and building small forts among the rubble. The place had the feel of an adventure-land, deserted and wild. Scattered about were large berry bushes from the time when gardeners had come daily to tend the grounds. Now they were overgrown, slowly spreading out their roots to conquer the lawn, but they still bore fruit - blueberries, pears, apples, and chokecherries - on which the children feasted until they felt sick.

The three of them lay in the long grass of the back yard, looking up at the night sky and listening to the chirping of crickets.

"What's it like to die?" Cory asked in a hushed voice.

"I don't know. Why don't you try it and find out." Jeff said cynically.

"Shut up." Becca turned over and leaned her chin on her hand. She had beautiful eyes - green with a ring of hazel at the center. "I think it's like being on a plane that's falling, just gliding down. You slip into unconsciousness."

Cory looked up at the stars stretching out above him, millions of points of light against a black emptiness. He knitted his brow. "How can a plane fall?"

"An airplane, stupid," Jeff sneered.

"Oh." They lay quietly for a while, eating the sun-warmed chokecherries they had picked that afternoon. Cory let the juice slide slowly down his throat. "Well, couldn't it also be like being on a plane with the grass waving in the wind - and as you die the sun dims and the wind becomes stronger until it just blows you away?" He got no answer. Becca and Jeff had stopped listening. "Or maybe it's not so beautiful." The sound of crickets wrapped around them in the darkness and the long grass prickled their backs. The trees rustled.

"Kids, it's time to come in. Cory, you should be in bed now." Their mother's voice wavered out from the lighted doorway, breaking the spell. Cory rose reluctantly.

"All right. I'm coming."

• • • •

"Mom, can I have the car tonight?" Cory burst into the kitchen and flung down his school bag.

"No. I need it. What for?" She continued making dinner without turning round.

"I have a date."

"At your age?" His mother turned around.

"Mom, I'm seventeen. Becca was going out on dates in the sixth grade."

"I was not!" Becca walked into the kitchen. He'd forgotten she was home from college on vacation.

"Never mind." His mother turned back to the dinner. "I guess you can."

"Can what?" Jeff yelled from the living room. "I hope you

didn't say he could have the car. You promised it to me yesterday."

"Forget it." Cory left the kitchen.

"Your mom wouldn't let you have the car?" Erin looked over at Cory.

"Watch where you're going." Cory was always antsy with someone else driving. "No. Jeff had already asked." They had taken Erin's parent's car with no trouble. She was an only child, and for the thousandth time Cory wished he was too.

"Aren't siblings wonderful," Erin laughed.

The siren of a police car shrieked directly behind them and the red and blue lights danced through the car.

"Shit." Cory slammed his fist on the dashboard. "You were speeding."

Erin pulled over and rolled down the window angrily. The cop strolled up, saw that she was impatient, and took even more time.

"Do you know why I pulled you over, Ma'am?" he drawled.

"To invite me to the policemen's ball," Erin snapped sarcastically.

"Policemen don't have balls," he replied without thinking. He stood there, turning a deeper and deeper shade of red.

"That's another fifty dollars, honey," he snapped. "Anything else you wanted to say?" He raised his eyebrows a half inch. Cory turned to look out his window, hiding a smile.

"Buuussted," he singsonged as the cop strutted back to his car.

"Shut up," Erin replied, starting to laugh. It was contagious.

"You know Leena?" Erin asked. Leena was a girl at the high school who was very antisocial. She dressed in complete black every day.

"Yeah. Why?"

"Don't you feel sort of bad for her? I mean, she has no friends at all."

Want to ask her to come to a movie with us tomorrow?"

"No, but we can if you want." Cory shuddered at the prospect of going anywhere with such a morbid person.

"Maybe she's not as bad as she seems. I'll call her."

"Thank you so much for asking me!" Leena paraded between them, talking loudly. She had on a long flowy black dress with patterns of lacy white flowers scattered over it. The dress opened in a V down the back, revealing her smooth spine and pale skin. Black stockings smothered her legs, leading into thick heeled black shoes with bright silver buckles. Her naturally crimped red-brown hair was flung across her shoulders. "I've never been to a movie with friends before." The humming of an airplane sounded overhead, and suddenly Leena fell to her knees, covering her head with her arms.

"What's wrong?" Erin glanced nervously at Cory. The sound faded away into the distance with the plane, and slowly Leena rose, her eyes wide with the look of a hunted animal.

"I hate them," she whispered. "Let's get into the theater." She took her seat between them and declined the popcorn Cory offered. "I wish they'd make it gray or something. It's just too bright to eat that way." Cory rolled his eyes.

"What do you hate?" Erin asked.

"Shhh." Leena cowered in her seat. "Planes," she hissed. "They're like death...."

"What do you mean?" Erin raised her eyebrows.

Leena moved towards her. "It's the noise. When a plane goes by the noise just grows and grows, like it's falling out of the sky, and I can't breathe. It's like I'm suspended in panic. My mind focuses on a picture." She glanced around. "A silent picture of a bomb crashing to the earth, straight down onto me." Cory mouthed the word 'crazy' to Erin. "It's like a disease. Once the fear grips you, it just stays there eating away. I mean, if people kill each other all the time in wars, then couldn't a bomb come flying out of the air at any moment?"

"Let's go." Erin rose and started to push her way out of the theater. Cory followed.

"But what about the movie?" Leena asked as she hurried

out at their heels.

"Some other time," Erin replied hurriedly. They began walking towards home.

Leena put on a pair of black sunglasses that completed her costume. "Do you think I should dye my hair black or would that be too...drastic?"

"Nothing's too drastic for you," Cory said under his breath.

"No," she continued. "I think that would be too much." She rambled on until they had deposited her at her house.

"Sick maniac," Cory muttered when he was alone with Erin. "The plane's going to get me!" he squeaked in a high voice, pretending to cower on the ground.

"Stop it," Erin laughed. "It's sad."

Cory shook his head. "It's sick."

• • • •

Cory walked into his small dorm room, mopping the sweat from his face. The room was full of half-packed boxes. School had gotten out a few days ago and Cory was planning on going home in a week and trying to find a job for the summer. He switched on his message machine. It was the only way his parents could reach him at college.

"Cory? It's Mom. Your dad was hurt in a car crash. Could you come home. We need you." The voice was distant, like the ghost of a memory. Cory switched off the machine, picked up his phone, and dialed home. After twelve dismal rings, he slammed the phone back in place. Then, with one sweep of his arm, he hurled it across the room. It smashed into his bureau, knocking down a picture of his family.

Cory drove home the next day and met his mother in the kitchen. "Go in and see him. He's in the living room." Line seemed to have been carved into his mother's face since he last saw her.

His dad had been strong and proud, always carrying himself erect. Cory walked slowly into the room, his steps dragging. His father sat in an armchair in a dark corner. Now he leant on

cane, walking painfully about the house. Cory stayed with them through the summer. Becca was off working - some kind of temporary modeling job, she said. She sent letters saying she wished she could be there, but gradually the letters dwindled. Jeff had gotten into drugs and was somewhere in New York City. They didn't hear from him.

• • • •

"Can I have the paper, honey?" Cory sat at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee. Lauren, his wife, handed him the paper. Cory glanced over it and an article about Marshfield caught his eye: Yesterday, June 12th, two children, Mike Levin and Jeremy Roate, ages eleven and thirteen respectively, were kidnapped from the Cleary estate in Marshfield. They went there to play directly after leaving the public middle school accompanied by a third child, Chris Evans, age ten. According to Evans, they were held up by a male, about thirty years old, who was carrying a handgun. Evans was allowed to leave but his two friends were forced to remain. A search is being conducted but as of now nothing has been discovered. The estate has been deserted for over forty years and it was therefore unlikely that anyone would be there to help them. The estate has been closed off and in the future will not be open to the public.

Cory sat staring at the article.

"What's wrong?" Lauren was watching him.

Cory shook his head. "It's the Cleary estate in Marshfield where I used to play with my brother and sister - there were two kids kidnapped there yesterday." He looked at Lauren without seeing her. "I played there every day when I was a kid."

"Mom, Ben and I are going out to play," Lynne said as she ran through the kitchen.

Cory looked up. "I want to go back and visit Marshfield. I could show you where I lived - it was right by the estate, but it was safe back then."

The car sped along the wet road. There had just been a shower but now the sun had reclaimed its position in the sky, float-

ing among the clouds in an orange haze. Sunlight glistened off the water droplets that coated the trees. "I know it's on the right," Cory said as he looked around.

"You lost?" A man with a receding hair line but a benign face stopped his car next to them.

Cory leaned his head out of the window. "No. I'm just looking for a house I lived in twenty-five years ago."

The man's face erupted into a smile. "Welcome back!"

"Here it is." Cory parked the car at the top of a gravel driveway and the kids jumped out, their legs stiff from the long ride. The house sat at the bottom of a steep hill surrounded by forest. It gave the impression of sitting in a bowl.

"There didn't use to be trees around. It was all fields when I was a kid." Cory walked down the stone steps that slanted across the hill. Two large orange-blossom trees overshadowed the hollow, permeating it with a strong sweet fragrance. The steps were matted with old, wet leaves. Cory looked more closely at the house. "I don't think anyone's living here right now." He looked around but no-one was listening. Lauren was looking down the driveway where there was more of a view and Ben and Lynne were chasing each other in circles. Cory peered in one of the windows. The house was the same: the large fireplace with its blue Dutch tiling and the bow window that stretched across the dining room. Except now there was no furniture. Garbage was scattered about the yard and overturned lawn chairs sat rusting in the driveway.

"It's deserted," Cory whispered. "It's like a neglected memory sitting here waiting for me."

"Deep. That's deep." Ben had snuck up on him unnoticed and stood looking up with a slightly mocking expression dancing in his eyes.

As they rolled away, Cory watched the sky unfold above him as the road unraveled before him. It was the pale blue of an autumn day, so pale that Cory felt it might fade from before his eyes. But just as he thought he might lose it, the shade deepened slightly, burning against the outline of the trees on the horizon.

• • • •

Cory sat quietly, listening to the hiss and pop of the fire and watching the showers of sparks fly into the air. They settled on the blackened brick at the back of the fireplace, glowing like cat's eyes. White light reflected in from the banks of snow outside the polished windows, and Cory squinted slightly, adding to the masses of wrinkles accumulated around his eyes. A calico cat lay curled on a chair, and behind, a picture of his wife and children beaming into the camera sat on the piano. Cory held a pile of photographs in his hand, fingering the frayed edges and shuffling them like a deck of cards. He arranged his memories methodically: an evening under the stars with the shifting of breeze in the trees, a nervous date with a girl lost track of long ago, a small theater torn down to make room for a mall. He sat patiently, waiting for the next photograph to add itself to the pile.

*Kim Ballard*

# Bottlecaps

---

my mother's bottlecaps  
from the soda company contest  
lie scattered on her desk like raindrops  
she keeps waiting  
to win the dream vacation  
and often wins odds and ends:  
a free soda, a shoelace, a coupon  
she is a partial winner

she tells me  
her father was a Vegas gambler  
her mother a rambling pianist  
and nothing equals

driving home from the drugstore  
with her unopened bottle  
of possibilities

*Kate Zangrilli*

# Bluegrass

---

Five years ago, I came home from school to find my mother sitting on the roof of the neighbor's garage. She was reading *The Mystery, Power and Intrigue of the CIA: A Comprehensive Guide to America's Top Secret.*

"Give me a hand, Jill. I can't climb down with all these books." As her words flew down to me, she threw five hard-cover library books over the side of the roof. She swung down a near-by tree, saying, "I looked out the window this morning and saw these books on the Potter's garage," I imagined the books perched against the black shingles like birds on a drainpipe. "Noah Potter and his spy manuals," she sighed.

She told me to return them to Noah Potter, who was in my class at school. I liked him as he thanked me in his quiet, embarrassed way.

Five years later, I hated him when he arrived breathless on my doorstep.

"Your mother isn't coming back! I saw her get up and brush her hair as usual, but when she left, she looked the place over one last time," Noah exclaimed, waving his binoculars.

My mother used to say he knew when we went to the bathroom.

"Get out of here," I spat, "Now."

Noah walked backwards all the way home, watching my flaring eyes. I ran upstairs to convince myself he'd been lying. I couldn't find her suitcase. Three days later, after my father had called the police and acknowledged that she had deliberately "disappeared", I did not think about my mother; I thought instead of my hatred for Noah Potter.

Did you ever think, sweet mother of mine, that your leaving would make me tear up Mrs. Potter's roses in the ink-shadowed night, or soap up Noah's windows?

Strange things act as medicines, and so I tell you the story

of the summer after you left. When I need to hear your voice, I find it in my own; this genetic heritage your only legacy. Strange things act as medicines. Maybe your star, long conjoined with the sun of tragedy, broke loose. I, too, will break loose. I will tell my own healing.

On the second full moon of the month, hence a blue moon, it smells like hot dogs and charcoal. I throw two suitcases into the trunk of our car. Dad hums, perfecting the role of the absent-minded father, wearing his cotton-candy blue fisherman's cap and the smile he might save for a senile relative in a nursing home.

"You're sure about this cheerleading camp, honey?" he asks as he shuts the trunk. He uses his kindly-grandfather voice, the voice with nothing in-between the lines. "Sure you can't just jump around at home?"

"Dad, I think we've been over this. Cheerleading is a skill, not just jumping around. If I want to make the team, I've got to work at it!"

"OK, Jill. Off to Kentucky. I just wish they had cheerleading camps in Pennsylvania; that's all. I don't like you so far away," he sighs dutifully.

I look back at our house and say to my father, "I think it's for the best, really," but he does not answer, because, tickle, tickle, fickle tickle, I am touching territory away from the concrete, and my father no longer talks in the abstract. The art of abstraction is my father's mistress, meant to be secretly believed in but never articulated. After you left, he preferred to like the tangible. He now prefers to delight in nuts and bolts, car parts, roller coasters. He prefers to love motors and broken clocks; he will no longer read a novel or visit a museum.

We climb into the blue Chevy and my father says, "You don't even know anyone in Kentucky, Jill, except that friend from grade school who moved down there somewhere. Right?"

"Oh. I'd forgotten about her. You're sure you don't mind me leaving for other reasons? I'll stay home if you don't want to be alone."

He does not answer.

Dad sometimes blamed it on Chuck Berry and the emergence of rock & roll. Other times he blamed it on her blonde hair. When he came home late, he blamed it on the fact that he had left the gas tank near empty when she had asked him repeatedly to bring it home full. Sometimes I think he blamed it on me, but he never said so and I never asked. Usually, he didn't blame it on anybody because he didn't believe it and came home evenings expecting to catch her shadow shifting across the kitchen floor.

We drive across miles and miles of interstate, black ribbons against the earth, all leading to the Bluegrass state, black strands of hair on maps, all leading to a tangle nowhere in particular. We stop at a small hotel where I collect the thin bars of complementary soap. In the morning, we are once again two intersections of chemicals and dust, taking insignificant routes south. Somewhere along the morning-bathed highway we pass a sign glittering in the sun which exclaims, "Welcome to Kentucky, The Blue Grass State." O, Kentucky. I tell my father it looks like the dawn's early light of a patriot's hymn, but he keeps on driving.

I know why Mom left. Mom left because the dishwasher had broken, and she left because Dad had brought the gas tank home empty again. Mom left because it was spring, and because the geraniums bloomed and bled red all over the porch. Mom left because the moon was bright and because she could, because she had read a sad story in the newspaper that morning. She left because Dad was a boring man and she was still a beautiful woman. Silly, boring, brilliant man, my mother's leaving had nothing to do with rock&roll.

We pull up before the small college where America's Foremost Cheerleaders gather for Practice, Fun and Cheers! I take my suitcases up the front stairs. I wave as he leaves, his car shrinking to a speckle on the retreating road.

The women in our family are always running away. My

grandmother, who neither my mother or I ever knew, bore my mother in St. Mary's Home For Un-Wed Mothers three states away from her alleged hometown, leaving her daughter a one-word legacy: Ava. Ava was my mother's name and my middle name and sometimes Mom would wonder where she came from out loud, and sometimes we would imagine that not knowing was better. We joked that Ava was the lovely voice of the lady on the tupperware commercials.

I enter the hall and a short, athletic woman asks my name. "Jill Lane" I tell her. She looks through her "L" index cards twice.

"You are not registered here. Do you have a receipt of your registration?" By now the hall is becoming crowded. "Step aside. We'll see what we can do."

I nod and step outside. I am alone in Kentucky with no money and no place to stay. I carry my suitcases down the stairs.

My mother tried not to run away for those first eighteen years; she studied what she had to study and married who her adopted parents told her to marry. But my mother had the banshee blood of a mystery mother, and scattered like fairy dust on a clear night in June.

A pick-up truck rolls into the lot and a young woman jumps out wearing cut-off jean shorts and a white tee-shirt splattered with grease. She looks right at me and cries, "Jill, you little hellion!" Five years ago, when Kate Cassidy moved to Kentucky, she was overweight and soft-spoken. She is now tall and wiry, with a loud and wildly electric smile. She picks up both suitcases and tosses them into the truck. I climb into the passenger seat and pick up her pack of cigarettes.

When I was still in school, I skipped around commitment like a rock across pond water. I kept the class treasury, quit, played softball for a year intensely, and then I quit that too. I wrote for the newspaper for a while, danced for seven years, and then I formed rock&roll group which fell apart before I could quit. I have my mother's rich alto voice, and whenever I'd fought with my father

and sat by my window feeling abused and alone, I'd talk to myself with my mother's voice, saying my name over and over again. When I closed my eyes, my voice was my mother's soft hands running down my temples. When at night I sang myself to sleep, my voice was my mother's spontaneous laughter gliding in and out of my room, a jimmy of joy caught in an old Irish lullaby.

"So your Dad bought the whole thing?" Kate asks.

"Kit and caboodle," I reply. "I called the Cheerleading Association of America and sent away for the brochure, bought myself some pom-poms and asked my father for the registration fee."

"Why did you pick cheerleading? He knows you were never a cheerleader."

"It was the first camp in Kentucky I could find. Besides, he was so embarrassed that he didn't know I was a cheerleader he didn't even comment."

"Christ," Kate says.

The women in my family are a tribe of nomads. We were the frontiersmen who cut across America, carving ghost towns out of the wilderness until we reached the far blue ocean in the west. Along the way, the ones who built the banks and planted the orchards stayed behind, but we pushed on, we who were not so sedentary, feeling our blood grow cold, and our pulse twitch uneasy if we stayed in one place too long. Funny how nowadays a stranger without roots makes the sedentary folk wary. Who can say that America has lost her frontiers? We have a new frontier to saw open. The explosion of the steam engine has replaced the rumble of bison, but the frontiers span other planes, more plains. "We move," Kate Cassidy said with a twinkle and a wink, "because we have to."

Kate Cassidy has unpacked my belongings into her room. "Okay, Jill, let me be brief. I haven't told you much in my letters. Your mom takes a hike, and you send me a novel; if my mom moved to the moon, I might mention it."

"Your letters are all about David." I say petulantly.

"My letters are all about David. Anyway. My parents are

no longer working with Gideon's Bible. No more Gideon's Bible stuff. Well, actually, we've got boxes of them in the basement, but," she laughs mirthlessly, "my parents are realtors. We sell houses of the rich and famous, to the rich and gullible. My parents are sometimes home, but are usually out selling big houses. So we get to do whatever we want, except when I'm working on my photos."

After you left, I noticed the way our language and literature decries the nomad, but cannot ignore him. I noticed the way words which define movement, such as "errant" which means "wandering, roving" include a second definition, in this case, "erring" which bespeak negativity. Biblically, Cain, the murderer, is expelled and forced to wander. Conscripted freedom: that is Cain's punishment.

Kate Cassidy makes photographs where she combines or eliminates different objects in a print to her client's satisfaction. Once a client wanted to sell an old, dignified house. Kate hung pictures through the house of the house: the house when it was first built, the house in the 1800s, the house in the 1920s, the house in the thirties, in the forties, and so-on. She varied the types of cars she parked outside to give her pictures a time frame. In other prints of this house, famous people casually appeared doing ordinary things. She wanted the house to have a story that appealed to anyone, and the only story that the house really had - that the previous owner had hung himself in the back room - would appeal to only a quirky few. So Kate Cassidy made her own stories. James Dean stood on the porch, looking west and smoking a cigarette; JFK and his brother played catch in the backyard, and Emily Dickinson carried lemonade out the front door. Kate blew her prints up to huge sizes, framed them and hung them. The house which stood on the market for one year at a mediocre price, sold for an extravagant sum two weeks later.

"If you look at my pictures," Kate Cassidy said, "you'll see there's not too much to them: no deep meanings, no new ways of interpreting space, no innovative definitions of fuchsia or melodramatic symbols of surviving loss." For a moment she looked almost sad, contemplative. "There is one thing, though, that makes me

pictures art." I waited as she gazed down at a picture of James Dean. "I've got one helluva cast of characters! And they do some surprising things!"

Why did you go, sweet mother of mine? If I asked you, you would not be able to tell me. The inexplicable itch in your blood used to be understood that way: people said you had wild blood. Now they credit wild genes. I personally think that nomads wander and we wild women roam because we believe in destiny, a malleable, ductile destiny, and we believe that by chasing, we'll have a better chance of catching our dreams. There it is now, the hollow ring of a train's whistle. And there, the rumble of wheels over century-old track. The whistle sounds again. It called my mother and stirs my own blood. You hear it softly at first, so softly you imagine you invented it, like the imagined echo off raindrops. It grows louder, and you begin to feel it, like the tremor of the river of the tale twice-told. Does it ever call you back?

At six-thirty-seven the following morning, Kate storms into our room.

"Guess what?" she cries, waking me. "We're getting part-time jobs at FunWorld, Lexington's amusement park! For the next three weeks FunWorld is hosting a circus, and it needs extra teenagers to help."

"Great. I love shoveling elephant waste. You know that's what we're going to be doing."

"You might. But *I'm* working with the owner's son. Gold are his eyes, with green streaks like a tiger's, and he has blonde hair, bright as cut hay. I met him when I was walking over by the park. Sparkle, sparkle, a smile in his eyes, and I've sold my life for minimum wage."

"What about that Dave person?"

"I love Dave. We're getting engaged this summer. I just thought the owner's son was good-looking. Okay?"

The wrong in abandonment lies in the insensitivity to those left behind. It exceeds the wrong of a broken promise or an act of

high robbery, because it is a crime committed against those closest to you. I see it as the most complete form of betrayal, and the safest. The one who leaves isn't the one left behind.

Kate sends me to Dave's house while she works in her dark-room. She tells me I must convince him to seek employment with us at the park. I ring Dave's doorbell. No one answers. I begin walking back to Kate's house when someone flings open the door.

"Get back here!" he calls, "Get back here this instant!" I hesitate. "Young lady! Young lady! If you will not do it for me, then do it for your country!" I laugh, feeling laughter spread like a strange medicine through me.

"I'm Kate's friend, Jill. I am here to convince you to join the circus," I explain.

He slams the door in my face. One minute later, he opens it and asks me in.

His hair sticks up in several places and he wears flaring red pajamas which have stars, comets and bright blue birds on them. We walk up to his room which is cluttered with books all over the floor, papers and paper air-planes, soda bottles and stamps. Star glow above my head; part of his face disappears behind a low-hanging planet.

He explains them away, "I was bored, so I cut stars from glow-in-the-dark paper. Then I hung them from my ceiling using clear floss. I arranged them in their actual constellations." But these stars do not go away. They hang, beautifully, and make his room explode into galaxies.

"Wow," I say.

We talk about stars. Imagine a conversation about stars. Imagine a room with stars hanging from its ceiling. The world for you must also jump up roundly into constellations.

The policeman has dimmed all of the lights in the park and locked the gates, leaving one side door unlocked down by the elms groves. Kate insists that we stay for a midnight snack with the circus folk who have spread out tents in the groves. Kate and Alex, the owner's son, have gathered all the teenagers for a game. The g

who walks the tight-rope, two mimes, a clown, and a juggler sit in a circle. Everyone's face is pale without their white powder or stage make-up, except for Kate's which flushes red with laughter and Alex's, which has a ruddy glow.

Alex is beautiful. He has a face of strong straight lines, a lean body like the letters of his name: crisp alignments, sharp, angular definitions, a proportion like the tall, slim "l" in the middle and a uniqueness like the "x" at the end. Oh he's tall; it surprises me when he's close to me how tall he is, because from a distance he's just a few inches taller than me; his lips would touch my eyes. He has lazy blue eyes, nothing sharp; they're a long, slow burn and a diligent gaze. Kate Cassidy likes him because he is externally beautiful, and a flipped version of Dave, who internally is caverns and caverns of beauty.

"This is a game I learned from a girl in San Jose," Alex says quietly. "We go around in a circle and choose Truth or Dare. For example, let's say it's Kate's turn. She'll choose Truth. Then we ask her a question, and she has to answer it. We try to think of the most embarrassing question we can." The acrobat, who looked about fifteen, laughed. "Then we go to, what's your name?" Alex asks me.

"Jill."

"Then, say Jill chooses Dare. We dare her to do something extraordinary."

"Like walking across a tightrope?" The acrobat suggests, inclining her head gracefully to one side, like a question mark, and caressing Alex with her shining brown eyes. Alex replies impas-sively, "No. Like sticking her head in a toilet."

One of the mimes chooses Truth. The clown says, "Tell us why you came to the circus."

"Gimme a color." The mime asks the clown.

"Purple."

"Think of a vice," he asks the acrobat.

"Drinking?" she asks.

The mime turns to Kate with a wide smile, "Gimme a city."

"New York."

The mime looks at Alex, "A state?"

"Vermont."

The mime requests of me a woman's name and I give him Ava.

"Have you ever been in Grand Central Station after midnight?" The mime begins. "The city never sleeps, and the station never slumbers. The lights flicker off of Dunkin' Donuts counters and small, dark men swathed in heavy accents sell plastic thimble souvenirs out of cardboard boxes. My train arrived from New York City, Vermont, a rural town which boasted of a traffic light, a post office down the road, and a dancehall. My whole village could've slipped into the throbbing center of Grand Central, but I wouldn't return for the whole world. At sixteen, I was a man, and I was done with small towns and small town politics. My father managed the market, and was an alcoholic, and my mother was the dentist and drank to be with him. Kids liked to make fun of me for my father's drinking and my mother's money. I loved a girl named Ava from the first grade until the day I left, but she refused to talk to me, because her daddy was the preacher and we didn't go to church. So I vowed I'd find me a prettier girl and lose the liquor in my name and the money in my breath. I came to New York, the biggest city I could think of. The evening I arrived, the sky was flushed purple, the color of passion and twilight."

"Bullshit." Alex says. "I don't believe a word of it."

Kate walks her fingers up Alex's arm until she reaches his neck. She then claps her hand around his mouth. Looking bright-eyed at the mime, she says, "Go on. Tell us how you got to the circus."

"Well. New York's a big place, and I went to Brooklyn, the Bronx, Chinatown, past every corner and under every stairwell of the whole city, but no girl could shine a light half as bright as Ava's. So I moved. I went to Tucson, Des Moines, Charleston and even Pittsburgh. You know," and this is said parenthetically, "once you've been around the world seven times, it goes completely flat, just like it was before Columbus. Flat as a pancake. Anyway, in Pittsburgh I met up with the circus. I figured I could see a lot more girls if I went with them, and here I am."

"Did you ever find her?" I ask nervously.

"Remember, I was looking for a pretty girl. I wasn't looking for Ava."

Alex's dad brings over a box of pizza.

Everyone agrees that the mime, damned liar though he is, deserves the first piece, and the clown, who asked such a sexless question, deserves the last.

Alex turns to me. "Truth or Dare?"

"Dare." I walk a few paces away from the circle and everyone whispers together. Alex waves me back. "Okay. Here it is. Pick your nose with your tongue." I pull and I push and I try, but I cannot pick my nose with my tongue.

"I can't pick my nose with my tongue," I say. Alex looks at the two mimes and at the clown. He steps forward and picks me up. The others run forward and take my legs, my arms. They carry me, laughing, away from the groves, the acrobat and Kate following us with shouts of glee. They carry me towards a fountain which is filled with clean, deep, blue water, shimmering like a magic brew, somehow baptismal, somehow medicinal.

"One, two, three!" Alex cries. They swing me forward, then back, and then forward. They let me go and my momentum carries me high, sprawling, and I sink down into the cold water with a splash. Kate cries out and runs toward me, tearing through the water as if it were sheets of ice. When she is close, I swim forward and grab her ankle. Alex leads the mimes, the clown, and the acrobat in after us. We are all wet and throwing waves at each other; we pull each other in and push each other out of the water.

We walk back, tingling from the cold water, and Alex asks me for a truth, since I failed the dare. The juggler whoops, "Tell us about a graphic sexual experience!"

"Ah," I say in a low voice. "I was sitting on my back porch, looking at fireflies in my back yard, when my neighbor, who wants to be a spy for the FBI when he grows up, ran by naked." Everyone laughs and demands: "AND?" I yell, "Nothing!"

"You have a back porch?" The acrobat exclaims.

"Jill has a back porch," Alex says, jealously.

"It's just a porch!" I cry, laughing.

"Yeah, but I bet you buy soap by the six-pack," the mime says.

"Yeah, we do buy soap by the six-pack. It's cheaper."

"We've got an apartment in Tucson," explains the mime "but we fill it with soap we've collected from hotels. We've never bought soap, let alone a sixpack."

"Soap's soap. Who cares about soap?" Kate demands.

"It's not about soap," the acrobat says sadly.

Kate mostly works with the circus folk, but the FunWorld management has sent me to work at the Candy Apple and Goodie Booth. I make soft-serve ice-cream cones- it's all in the wrist: fill the cone densely and then turn: one, two, three, loops which get smaller as you twist. I also sell red licorice, candy apples, apple dumplings, and cinnamon bow-ties glazed to shine. If I don't sell, bake, paint icing on the donuts, cast sprinkles on the brownies, or wire up the tanks to the soda-pop machines. On my breaks, I listen to the men building the fastest roller coaster in the world, right here in Kentucky, clink, clink, clink. I read and laugh at the funny bumper stickers on people's cars: "I love my freedom and fear my government: stop gun control", "make love not war". After breaks, I wipe down counters, sweep floors, and catch Dave's eye whenever he looks at me through the windows of his stand, which is directly across from mine. I cross my eyes and stick out my tongue, and he laughs and pretends to offer me a soft pretzel through the window. There are people here galore, and stories too. There's Psycho Anna now tossing cardboard boxes into a dumpster behind a brown picket fence. She earned her nickname by declaring, at five minute intervals, her undying love to Dan, her manager, whenever he yelled at her. She's so tragic, with her almost limp and stooped shoulders, she who should be so sure of foot and sleek of limb.

Sometimes Dave and I take our breaks together and watch Kate as she runs around the circus tents checking wiring with an air of urgent importance. She nods and then rushes away. Dave and I walk around the picnic groves.

As I dip apples into candy, I am conscious of him in the stand beside mine. We live on the periphery of each other's imagination.

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nations, the essence of flirtation.

It's an unlikely day for a revelation: dark with rain, infused with Friday's chores and summer's laziness. I am opening my stand when I see a man in a black mustache, baseball cap and sunglasses approach.

"We're not open yet!" I call through the window. He retreats to a table where he sits watching me as I clean. I wonder if my father has any friends in Kentucky.

During break, Dave walks with his head down. "I wish I could be young and obnoxious," he tells me. "I wish I wasn't already married!"

"You aren't!" I exclaim with a laugh.

"I mean, I love Kate. I want to spend the rest of my life with her." He looks away.

"But you want a fling."

"I prefer to call it an experience."

"Lots of girls like you, David. I mean, you say the neatest things. You have stars hanging from your ceiling."

David's name is a ribbon which threads itself through my thoughts and rises suddenly to the surface. I remember him hugging me once, before I went inside so he could kiss Kate goodnight. It was a hug at the door, a hug with arms only: nothing else touched. It was a gesture which meant everything and nothing, and I wondered momentarily how one action could be two different things at once.

At night as Kate is unwiring the circus, I begin again the daily ritual of watching cars leave the park and wondering which one is his. I imagine him at the wheel of a brown station wagon, an orange Oldsmobile, a Chinese-red subcompact convertible, an old, bruised Buick or even some pea-green foreign car with an exotic name. The lot is dark, with a few lights which cast bars across his chest and roll quickly up his neck, nose and eyes and finally drift back over his hair and fly out the back window as he drives forward.

We are two fish caught in the same current; we gyrate against the river's passion or with her drift in an undefined circle of the same radius and the same center. We move with the same rhythm and at the same speed, but we are two fish. When he is at one point in the circle and I swim directly below him, we are no longer two fish. We are one fish and his reflection.

It was raining so hard it could wake you up. I open my eyes and see Kate slip out of bed. Her shadow flickers in the moonlight as she pushes up her window and unlatches the screen. It falls to the bushes beneath.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

She does not turn around, but gazes out to the night, leaning out her window as if yearning for something. "Alex left today. He moved to Tucson to live with his mother. He just left, like going away was nothing." She leans out farther and then comes back in. "We have to leave an opening," Kate says returning to bed, "to let the ghosts out."

James Dean's figure, prominent by day in his 12x14 frame, fades into the nebulous cloud seeming to come from his cigarette but it was only moonlight, dusty, chalky moonlight, streaming through the open window.

Kate is crying the next morning. She locks herself in her darkroom for three hours. When she comes out, she explains with a smile,

"I want my pictures to take people on a joyride. When a person has to cope with something, when she's sad, fuschia does change a hair on a rat's ass. I want people to think they're sitting where Marilyn Monroe sat or climbing RFK's favorite tree. I want people to look at my photos and get away." She invites me into her darkroom where she shows me a picture of herself on a porch swing with Alex. In the photo, Kate's face rests against his shoulder, eyes closed, while he presses his lips against her forehead. She laughs, "How happy this picture makes me! I am going to hang it next to my photo of James Dean. Photography's the best medicine."

Gifted are those who dream, and blessed are those who

ten to the tales a dreamer tells.

"Does it ever bother you that your make-believe isn't real?"

"No," she says with a triumphant smile and her old laugh, "I'm an artist. I lie for a living."

Later on, during breakfast, Kate tells me, "Dave broke up with me last night." She begins to cry again and the color drains out of the kitchen.

I stand up and kiss her lightly on the cheek.

At work, I see the strange man again. I am not afraid; I hope he shoots me for his country. He circles around my stand like a shark, and when I am at register, he buys red licorice, one strand at a time. I tend to believe that he wants to shoot me; I watch the same psycho mystery shows as everyone else.

At night, I am waiting for Kate to finish unwire the circus. The strange man with the mustache and dark sunglasses walks near my bench. I look away as he takes off his baseball cap and pulls at his mustache. I hear him fold his sunglasses, click, click.

It is Noah Potter.

"According to my calendar, Jilly, cheerleading camp was over yesterday! You'd better call your Dad and tell him you're coming home with me; this is not a good scene."

Kate drives us to the train station. She smiles and shakes my hand firmly. Dave never says good-bye; I wonder if he and the acrobat, with whom I've seen him many times walking, are having a successful fling.

On the train ride home, Noah chatters beside me. "I'm a leuth," he explains. "I find the truth for a living."

The going is always better than the coming back. While departures are flushed with anticipation, the fusion between possibility and imagination, arrivals are balanced between probability and reality. It is possible that I will return home to both parents, but improbable, and while I can imagine returning home with my mother, the only other person I know on the train is Noah Potter.

For a few years, I will be content with my back porch and soap bought by the six-pack. For a few years, I will be content with my told healing. One day, though, the medicine will run out on me, my blood will steam and my pulse twitch uneasy. One day I will catch a train, a bus, a plane and head west. I will hear it calling, low, persistent, and I will go, fleeing town as if running from the law. I will not think of those I leave behind.

*Kate Zangrilli*



*Kate Nesin*

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## **“Sitting on the angle adjacent to him...”**

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Sitting on the angle adjacent to him  
Face twittering, nerves bisected  
“What is love anyway”  
Signaling with my thumb I move the ring around the  
full circumference of my forefinger  
Back to the origin  
“Who knows. Not me.”

*Erica Fruitman*

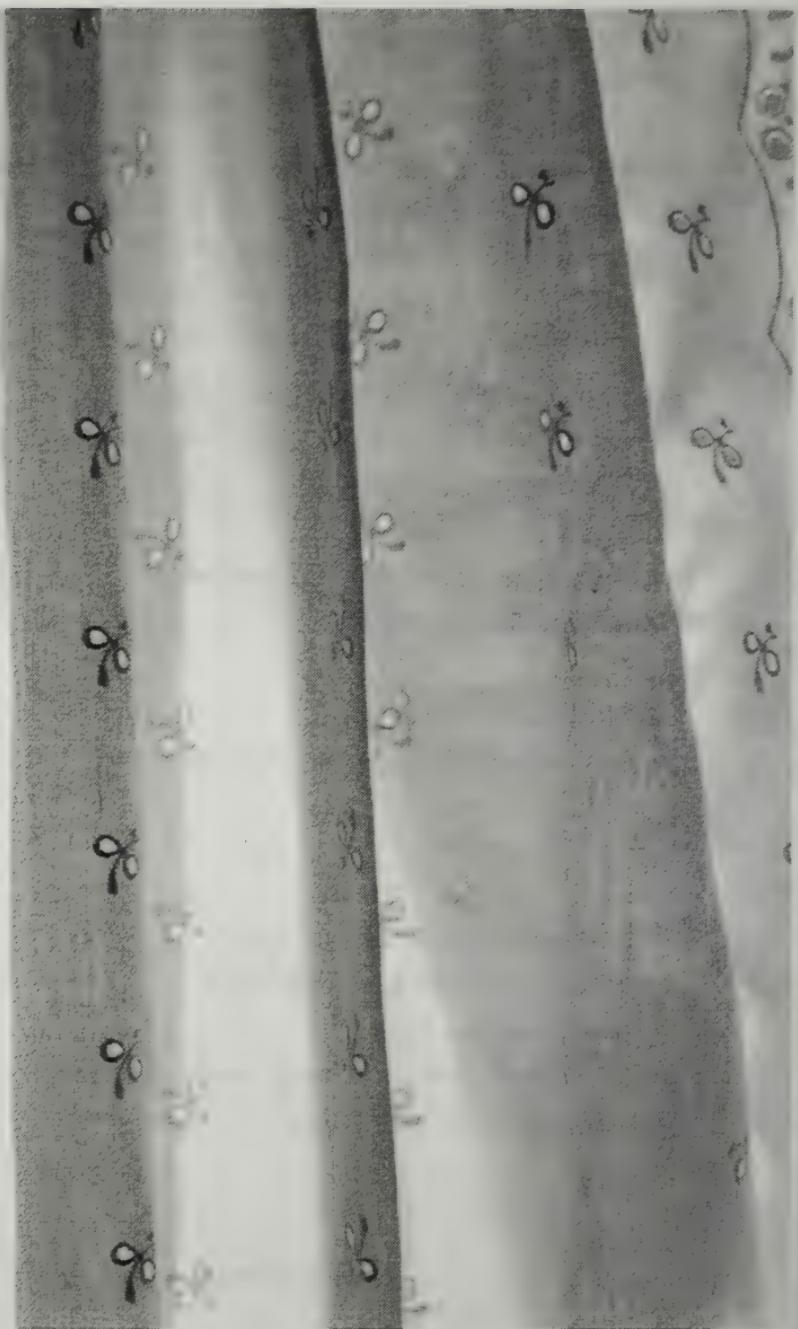
# Moth

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Tissuing the air beneath its petaled wings  
(among the dimming red of Ilford darkrooms  
the stale vacuum cleaners and  
dismembered  
baby dolls, toilet seats, soccer balls, trash bones)  
tranquil page to flip us onto the meat grill  
it gives us the scrolled message of  
still  
still  
while the actors are revving their batteries  
the reptilian skeletons they will display soon  
the aged secrets they will  
husk  
right on this putrid worn disco floor  
the disco of dysfunction

its few minutes of fame  
gardening and tilling this timed space of  
red  
green                  red  
green  
with its aimless search for light  
a reminder of slow life, that light  
starves some corners  
solidified with absence, with screens of dark  
this corner bears its fertility.

*Caitlin Berrigan*



*Caroline Whitbeck*

# The Photo Shoot

I want to say, 'you have the structure of birds,  
you endure as they do'

but you are a squeaky pup with the energy of hounds  
you do not recover your steps like cats, you do not say,  
I am already dead,' as I do.

I caught you with your face wanting something from me  
your fingers straddled steel strings of that electric guitar  
(you wrote songs about me, they had the eloquence of  
pop radio

but they made me smile; 'how naive,' I thought)  
and you lifted that waxy brown chin of yours  
allowed your neck to be naked

I took your photograph, I wanted to broadcast the German  
Jesus in you

and you stole my cold palm for a while,  
you are the one that needs touch.

I'd seen that morphing of your face before  
a double set of everything—and it all became so thick  
I knew you were ugly and I am a frog,  
we have no glamour, that is why I leave.

Even our words,  
they wear rubber gardening boots and slip on grass  
they are klutzy and masochistic, they have bumpy skin  
we fail even here and we call ourselves artists.

How could I let you squat on that dirty plot of carpet  
snaked with the umbilical cords of your avocations, your  
addictions

and earthquake with snot and salt, pleading for reason  
you make rejection a 1940s drama flick

(and we would have raving reviews)

you make it seem like I have no pulse and no purpose  
a boy-drinking undead vagrant with a backpack full of large  
words.

I know I shouldn't have returned to this Airstream flat of

yours

my feet are wet, I have run out of film.

I am sweating with boredom and I think you just saw all  
my pretty colours.

*Caitlin Berrigan*

# Light Film

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It's a record;  
sun slashing through  
the window and the blinds,  
particles, not dust but pieces,  
a diagonal shadow.  
Scissors cut hair into sharper ends  
like this sun cuts the window  
and the beveled wooden shelves.

The light hits.

I am rosy, glowing,  
and I know you are, though  
you pretend otherwise,  
the youngest doll, waxy, scrubbed and scuffed,  
and I know, too,  
I want—secretly—the height of  
you and her combined.  
How tall we would be then.

The universe can spin, doubling  
about the room,  
the stars and planets like bubbles,  
that kind of irregular blue,  
against the walls, fine powders,  
Bisquick or Antonia's Bath and Shower.  
The projection is in rainbow colors,  
many blues, and I am tall if not  
the color of bath water,  
bubbles,  
comets, constellations.

The window uses light  
little fingers. Projections

are best seen in a darker room  
against darker walls.  
But if it were otherwise then  
I could not see from here  
the bathroom shelf  
and you, tall in this space.  
Towering and slightly blue.

*Kate Nesin*

# Fallout, Shelter, Suture

---

1.     “chernobyl?”  
      “no, chamomile.”
2.     he says: “honey, I’m breaking boundaries.”  
      he says: “honey, I’m at the window.”

(beat)

“are you there?” he said  
“where?” I said  
“the bottom of the fishbowl?” he said  
“there’s nothing.”

touching me now  
fingertips  
fishy-mouthing

(beat)

“bend for me.”  
“I do not bend.”  
I do not bend

restless, indifferent  
stiff as trees

toes,  
interlocking branches  
but

splinterless

I do not split

I do not bend

branches bend  
but

glass

breaks.

3. you  
wash, wrists  
at the sink  
slip in the water  
clean the wound

glass is  
clear as water and  
cool to  
the touch  
as white linen  
gloves, gauze.

(beat)

“I do not bend; I break.”  
“splinters? splashes.”

I'm at the window-  
-pane,

glass gone  
nothing

but wood  
remains.

4. "kisses? what of care and kindness?"  
he is cut, wet red  
I cannot stand this mess

thread is  
stronger

than both of us.

(beat)

I sew,  
his hand in mine, a vow.

the stitch,  
the wound is  
warm to the touch—

touching him.

(beat)

a domestic  
clutter in the kitchen  
a dish, rag  
a curtain

I steep, I sip  
old tea, old

roots,

growing towards  
the light:

the kitchen fluorescent,  
the sun, the son,  
and so on:

(beat)

a flare! a flash!

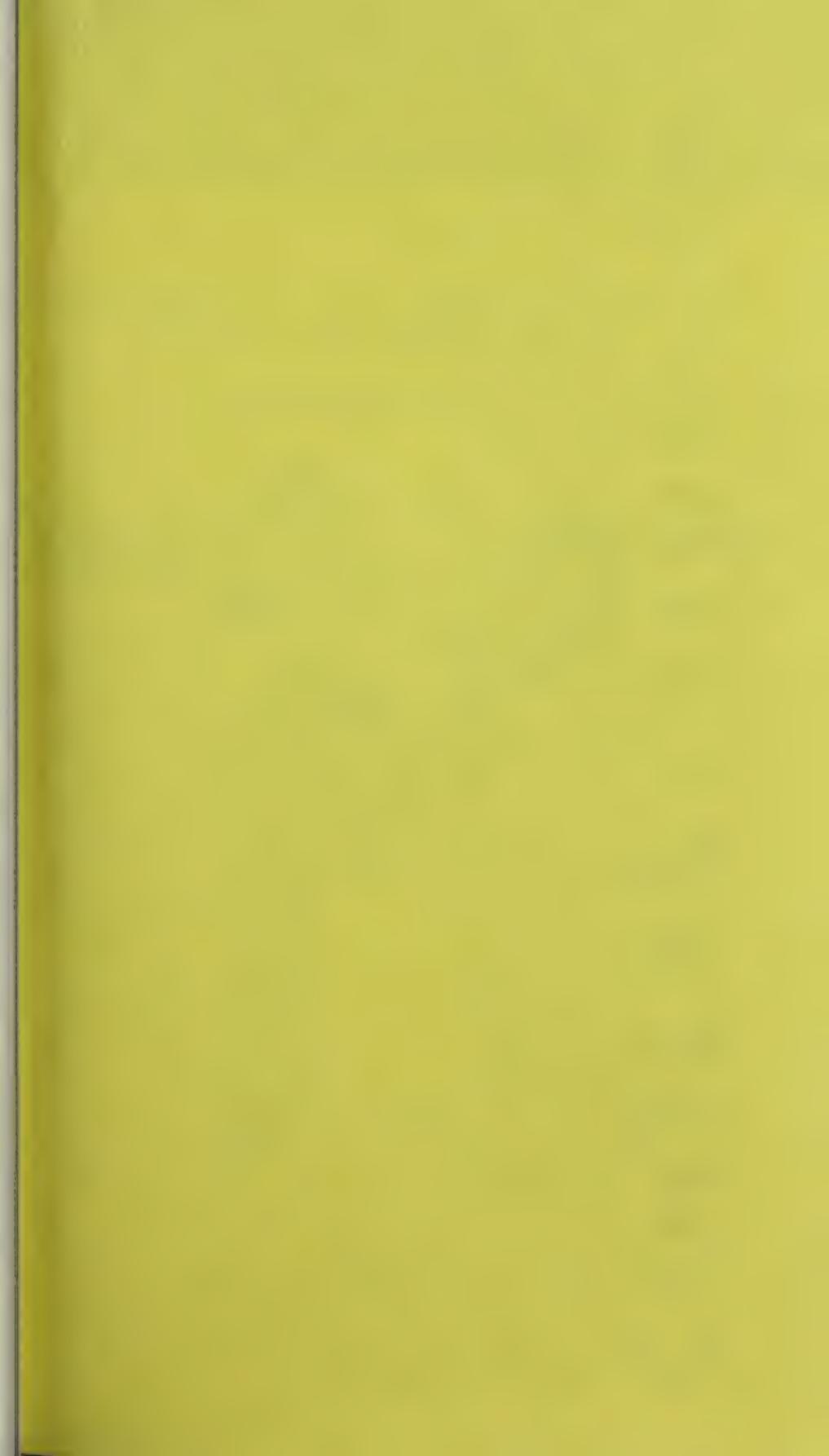
each a greater blast  
than the last.

*Caroline Whitbeck*



*Shivani Reddy*





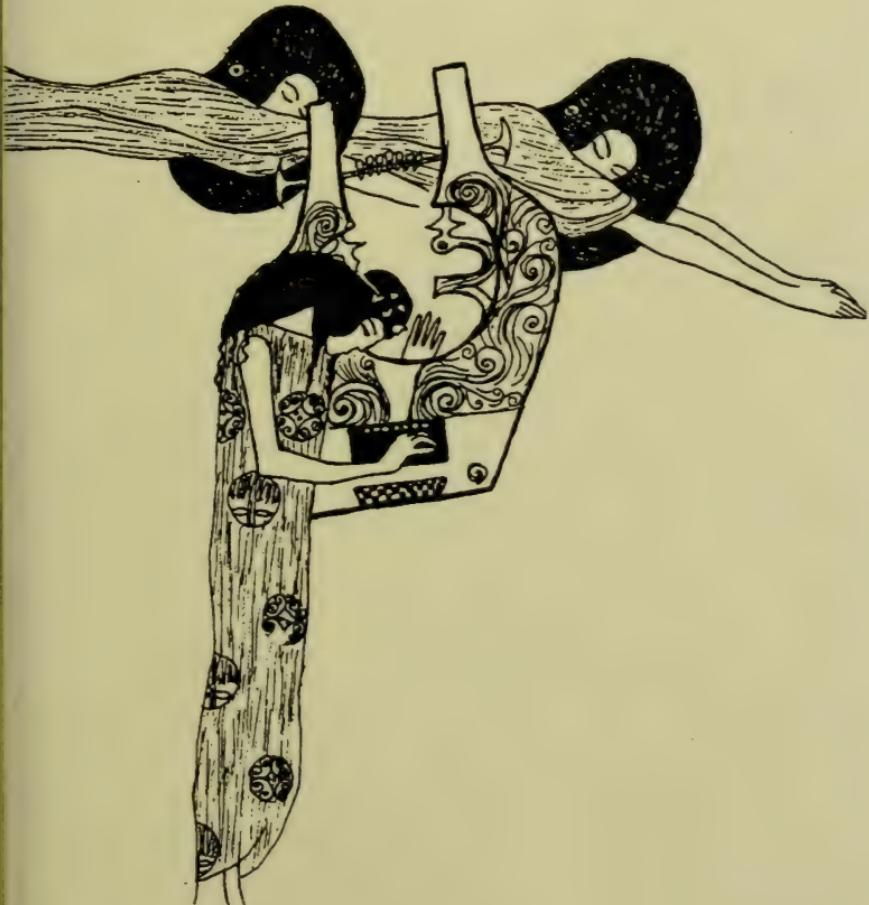
craig thorn  
nathan littlefield  
charlie finch  
mozhan navabi  
caroline whitbeck  
caitlin berrigan  
christina richardson  
erica fruiterman  
kate nesin  
katherine gilbert  
nick wilson  
kate zangrilli  
derek neathery  
shivani reddy  
amy o'neal  
alice lewis  
miriam berger  
caitlin mulhern  
anne borneuf  
mary ziegler  
will glass  
kim ballard  
andrea campbell  
julia magnus  
chris meserole  
orion montoya  
sara bright  
nathan hetherington

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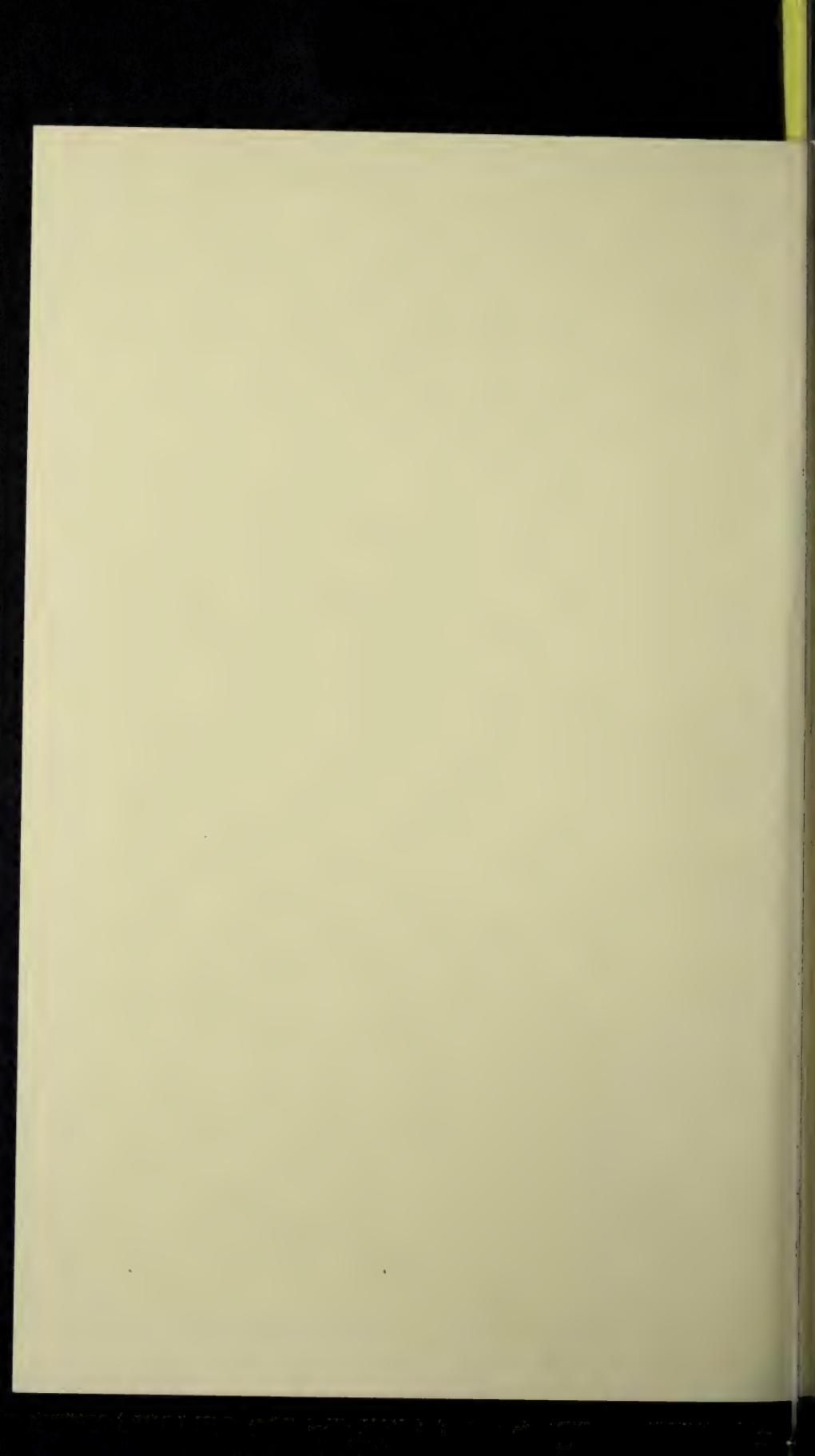
## POETRY AND FICTION

Maureen Chun



A Courant Chapbook

edited by Eva Lane and Katharine Gilbert



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**POETRY AND FICTION**

**Maureen Chun**

**A Courant Chapbook**

**Edited by Eva Lane and Katharine Gilbert**

The Chapbook was designed to showcase an author who has distinguished him or herself in the Courant. It is a collection of the author's published and previously unpublished work.

We hope you will enjoy this selection of Maureen Chun's writing.

*Cover Art, "Study of 'The Longing for Happiness Fulfilled in Poetry,' from the Beethoven Frieze by Gustav Klimt" by Grace Rollins*

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## INTRODUCTION: A STERN HOUSE OF SCENTS

*Kate Zangrilli*

In a way, Maureen Chun's poems are a series of marriages. In them we observe the marriage between the landscape and the individual, the fusion of image and aura, dream and tangibility, insight and language. However, it is the fruit of these marriages that distinguishes her as a poet. Beneath her elegant stanzas and carefully crafted unity, lies as she wrote in the "Shifting Season," the "common element," her "copper in the light."

Thematically, her speakers, individual inhabiting imperfect space, confront their environments to extract meaning. In "Verses," the speaker examines her past in the light of "what is important." She recalls "the shadow of green leaves" and "unremembers the sound little children" leading up to her final line the answer to her search for importance: "the missing symbol." Around this final insight, the entire poem leaps up and takes shape. In "Landscape," the moon "burns in white simplicity" purifying even the night air into "oblivion." The second stanza affirms the human connection to this landscape, showing how we too, purify, "through prayer." In "Desert Winters," the speaker observes the two conflicting shapes of a desert winter: one dusky and dull

he other mystical and radiant. In the third tanza: "what is more terrible/ than intuition gone awry," we find our missing symbol.

Stylistically, Maureen's poems are not laden with thick folds of vocabulary and description. She uses simple, strong adjectives to weave uncluttered phrases. "Leaves can stand for themselves," she told me. This discriminate selectivity recalls her poem "The Impressionists." Like the painters, Maureen's words flow in a "current of pure... strokes." When he uses a metaphor or simile, it connects to the subject matter; all of her words and devices contribute to the poem's development.

Maureen says that to write so simply, she had to shake off many of the things she's been told over the years, how she had to reject her original perceptions of "good writing." Once she recognized that a three-line Haiku could be as elegant as a book-length western Odyssey, her possibilities expanded. While a Chinese or Japanese poet might prefer one concise image such as "mountain," a western poet would perhaps favor "a snow-capped mountain beneath the clouds." Maureen frequency reviews a poem several times trying to pare it down, trying to simplify it into a sleeker, more elusive form. Because the images aren't decorated or dressed up, but rather outlined, they can have more meaningful personal associa-

tions for the reader. Using the previous example of the mountain, one simple word conjures up in my mind a mountain near my home, while another, more specific image, might not allow me the same freedom of interpretation. She tries to write a poem less of language than of sensibility, where aura and substance are balanced. In Maureen's poems, ice unlocks knuckles, desire is a river, hair is crushed to juice, and air, such a noun of feeling, becomes a noun of sound and sight, colored blue and yellow. Verbs are strong as concrete, and fresh as "blind new life" because she takes them out of their usual applications. Pores inhale black earth, making men's minds "itch" and "twist." And never expect her poems to wind to a close; never expect the themes of her poems, as she writes in "The Sun," to "dissolve, dissolve." Every ending makes her poems explode into a second level of interpretation. What began as a shadow ends as an intricate house of cards. In her deliberate, specific way, Maureen gives tongue to all the things we knew, but never knew how to say.

Now is the time to let her poems speak for themselves. Lift the latch, turn the page, and enter this stern house of scents.



**POETRY**  
Photograph by Anne Bourneuf

## VERSES

---

---

I have lived all my life  
as I should have  
lived my life.

I have worked until  
I have forgotten my hands  
and my long silky hair.

When it was time  
I have rested to think  
of the meaning of my dreams.

I have tried to take in  
the shadows of green leaves  
dancing in gold light.

This when I am working  
and have unremembered  
the sounds and the little  
children.

The veins in my hands  
are green and bolder. The roses  
are bright and satin-rich.

'These are for you.

These are for you." The water  
in the vase is fragrant

The mornings are clean and rich  
with sunrise. My moods as implacable  
as the trees and the splinters,

A stern house of scents,  
My life, my life.  
Everyday I write

Of what is important.  
I am still crying over  
what has not, the missing sym-  
bol.

## THE BLACK TREE

---

---

To no avail:  
The earth breaks and swallows the leaves.  
The grey birds are streaks against morning.

The morning was washed:  
An unstained glass-blue.  
The translucence

A sheet or mirror of light.  
Then there was a thickening,  
A blackening.

The pressure on the papery sky;  
The flickering of an absence, a void,  
Crackling, cracking my view.

Night and day flooded my branches,  
My cold arms, hard and dark.  
My bark dried and curled.

## LANDSCAPE

---

---

The moon burns in white simplicity.  
The night air is obliteration.

We think of the order of things,  
and compensate through prayer.

## THE SUN

---

---

These days have been poisoned in the sun.  
The thickness in my throat, the weight of my  
stomach...

Our bright bodies exhaling water, like oil.

I was born here. Born and raised,  
A family with dark hair and glassy eyes.  
The milk of our bodies, the fibers of our flesh  
Slow to a photograph. And we look up.

These years have blown away  
Like wood-shavings. The earth curls like  
paper.

Fire springs like flowers, and I  
Am content. I touch your hands warm with  
blood.

Soon the birds will claw at our hair and scratch  
Purple wounds on our lips. Soon the black  
clouds

Will dissipate and the air will dry. And you  
and I

Will smile true, and clear, and relieved, in the  
sun. And the themes of our lives dissolve,  
dissolve.

## THE SHADOWS

---

The wind blows headlong through watery blue  
and black shadows.

Thinking of ways to deceive you  
Amid flowers I cannot see or smell.

## THE SHIFTING SEASON

---

---

### I.

The blue I seek  
is the blue gleam of snow.  
It is too faint, really, to be compared  
to a halo. It is soft,  
and illusory, like an error  
of vision.

Yes, I appreciate snow;  
its suppressed crunch beneath my boots,  
the ice glittering beneath powder.  
Today it's all melting:  
There's a puddle at my doorstep.  
Ice floes, like small fruit, float  
in the stony wind.

### II.

When it's warm in winter, I expect the sun.  
When there's no sun, I think of home.  
Yellow moth-lilies in my room  
twittering on their long, green stalk  
as I blow on them.  
My dog hiccuping on my lap,  
a stillness quelling my hunger.

What I want is the common element,  
the copper in the light.

## THE TOURIST

---

Fear like a sickness  
Leaps up and licks my throat.

It is a yellow stone  
In a blood red sky.

I cannot believe in them until I crush  
Their rippling hair to juice.

## THE IMPRESSIONISTS

---

---

Through the window, across the street—  
Briefly— when snow is falling heavily,  
Heavily, the surface of the houses,  
The trees, your sand-colored scarf,  
Moves in a current of pure white strokes.

I hear it now.  
Since others sleep at night, I will lay down  
When the air is blue, before the light turns  
yellow.

## SOLITUDE OF THE BODY

---

I like the sound of night air,  
The origin of ocean waters, the hollow shells.

## THE NIGHT LIFE

---

Like Jesus, I wanted to walk across the water  
to the river's edge.

Like a miracle or a brilliance I wanted to follow  
the strand of gold light  
Across the dark opaque course of the river.  
That is desire.

I walked the path through the fields, to the  
river's edge,  
And wet my feet on the river's rocky bed. The  
sound of the flowing water  
Is rhythmic. Then there was no desire. Up to  
my thighs in water  
I walked into the stream and rested there. The  
water was cold and felt  
Too pure to be a substance.  
Water mixing with my marrow, the ice unlock-  
ing my knuckles  
And releasing my bones, like stones in the  
hand.

I was not thinking when I could no longer  
distinguish  
Between the small waves and the silver fish.  
calmed me;  
It was like finding relief in the sightless eyes of  
the dead.

## STATUES OF ART

---

Love was the climate of our convention.  
How I loved you, and still do.  
Your face resembles something  
Unassuming, with significance.

It is not even winter yet,  
And I am scrambling, frantic & heart-sick,  
To organize my visions & remember all these  
New objects and sights.

Winter kills my heart; spring makes me stronger,  
Though summers I am left wondering  
At the dark green limp leaves.

Some years change has little, or no, effect on me  
Because I am preoccupied  
With one thing, one image.  
But just as I forgot some words, and words  
Repeated,  
get sick of this one thing, sapped and flattened out.  
Why should I love the world  
When there is this image,  
Without meaning or privacy, without anything  
But calm. The world is frozen and calm.  
Here is the stone. We touch.

## SONG

---

In my dream the tongues  
of rich, velvet flowers  
dripped with dark sugars,  
drank in the pour  
of gold light.

I moved in the air  
of overripe fruit  
barely able to think, or smile;  
trying to speak, to say,  
This is the air  
buzzing with various truths,  
thick with happiness.

## THE MOODS

---

In the dark, the forests are primitive.  
There are the trees, stirring in the silence.  
The moon is clouded over.

Then a light, like a mind or an animal,  
Above the hill. It is the men,  
Walking on, and coming in.  
Their pores inhale the black earth.  
The pungent scent makes the mind itch and  
twist.  
The slow churn of rot, and the stir  
Of blind new life.

Rust falls from your body like hair.  
You, removed from what you thought  
You were, your tongue heavy in your mouth.  
... *O, this unformed soul, like the sap*  
*Trickling from the plant,*  
*Crushed beneath a glisten of wet stone.*

There are no more instructions. The light has  
gone out.  
After this loss, music.  
You were so entranced, you had forgotten  
All about the events to come.

REMEMBERING EVAPORATED MYRIADS

---

There is a period  
in sleep  
when

eyelids twitch  
and the eyes  
themselves

flutter as wildly  
as one  
blue,

nervous ghost.  
Eyes move  
when

a flux  
of voices  
inundates

the mind.

## DESERT WINTERS

---

They were impotent and dull.  
There was nothing about.  
Things were flat, inert.  
The only living voice  
Was the sharp, enervating wind,  
Stripping hair, clothing, grass,  
Their veneer flaking,  
Absorbing a dusty, dusky color.

In another time  
The desert winter was mystical.  
The moon, hanging in the acrid night,  
Fixed and radiant in its closed face.

What is more terrible  
Than intuition gone awry.



**STORIES**  
drawing by Laurie Kindred

## CALIFORNIA

---

*The tree alone resisted our eternal flux.\**

Outside, the sky was a weird, inspiring blue. It was twilight. The branches of the tree in front of the window were black against the background, distinct and dark like a network of dead veins swathed by the blue, still sky. The night was quiet, and the stillness was like the silence of a void or a netherworld, inhabited only by unsubstantial things.

Below the window, the street was vacant. On its borders were Spanish-style houses resembling modernized villas, covered with stucco. Some were painted ocher, others a pale tangerine. They were wide and staunch, with white gates that dazzled in the sun, and front gardens boasting clusters of small, bright flowers. The isolated trees grew on square lawns divided between neighbors with brick boundaries. Their eaves and the blades of grass, clipped neatly and evenly, were a dark green, smooth and waxy. The foliage, at once sparse and luxurious, had wilted somewhat since the desiccating air of fall had arrived.

When the sky was a fiery blue, the sun a flat white plate of light, the clean, even colors of the houses, the lawns, the gates, and the dull red

roof tiles would burn and blaze in their separateness. The heat would intensify the colors until the black street sizzled and the entire setting were like a painting of preternaturally pure pigments. Then, when the light would stagnate into sunset, saffron and pink, the windows would shimmer like sheets of oily, liquid gold. But it was twilight now, and the sky was emptied and washed clean. The original hues were muted and dimmed, their clarity dissolving in the layers of darkness.

There was little movement in the room, only the shivering of a girl wrapped in a towel who stood before the open window, allowing the musty air to flood the room and the water dripping from her black hair, collecting in delicate quivering beads on her arms, to evaporate on its own.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Terrans, "I am grateful. I am grateful for all you have done. I have nothing but gratitude for your considerate endeavors to please me. Do not accuse me of being ungrateful in the least. But despite your *virtuous* efforts and my *boundless* gratitude, I cannot say I am happy. Because I despise this place. I have been *suffering* too long, I decided this morning. I cannot stand this place. This perpetual warmth is killing me. It's killing my mind. I swear it."

She spoke languidly and caustically at

turns, and had risen slightly from the sofa while speaking. Her sallow face had hardened with a fierce resentment. Her dark eyes were directed at her husband with a loathing that fascinated Margaret, who sat quietly on the carpet pretending to read from a text opened before her. She could not focus on the reading in her step-mother's presence, and did not attempt to. She felt almost drained and numbed near this volatile woman, threatening with her very strange, very foreign notions and attitudes. Margaret simply absorbed the woman's countenance and her acrid words, glancing up occasionally, then returning to the page swarming with indecipherable black letters.

Mrs. Terrans licked her cracked lips, which had begun to bleed during her speech, and reclined on the sofa once more, the anger softening but the bitterness remaining and setting in. She touched her dry, thin cheek and began to cry. Mr. Terrans sat erect in his arm-chair, opposite his wife, and looked soberly out the window. His pure white hair was slightly disheveled. (He had gotten the mail, and the wind was still terrible.) His hands, too, were leathery and painful to behold. The folds of old age on his face, so harsh and clearly defined, did not move.

There was a precision and gravity in his manner, which many mistook for profundity, that was most apparent when he spoke. He spoke

with a reservation of speech and movement that impressed others, especially his daughter. He was never ambiguous, nor sarcastic. A severe self-possession inclined towards stoicism controlled his tall, lean, sturdy body. His features were perfectly symmetrical.

"How can warmth destroy the mind?" he inquired. He sipped his coffee.

Mrs. Terrans stared at the ceiling for a few moments before responding. She was still weeping when she turned to Margaret. "Maggie, look at me. Let me see your face."

Margaret obliged. Mrs. Terrans brightened a bit, then turned her face to her husband. "Maggie is bright. She is quick and intelligent. But she grows more sluggish everyday. If we stay in California any longer her mind will simply atrophy, I know it. I'm telling you warm weather produces weak-minded individuals. Now, I can take heat for only a few weeks, even months at a time. I want snow, I want the sharpness of winter. I want a New England landscape and the woods surrounding our old home. Here you have to import trees if you want some shade. I'm tired of this empty land and this oppressive weather."

As she reflected for a moment her eyes were desperate and pathetic. "I must point out Maggie's greatest flaw—her romantic nature. I'm sorry, Maggie," she said painfully, "but I mu-

dmit it, and so do you. You see, Carl, Maggie is very much like me. We may not be related by blood, but we are very similar. We both have sensitive, weak nerves. And this place—a desert, really—will drive us mad."

Mr. Terrans returned his mug to the table.  
Isabelle. We've been here a total of six months,  
nd you want us to move back. We came here  
or your health. Let's forget this idea of moving  
gain." As he spoke, he seemed to Margaret not  
er own father, but a man without identity,  
peaking words without distinction. He seemed  
ntouchable and infinitely dull, a relic from an  
nsignificant past.

"No!" shrieked Mrs. Terrans. "Goddamn  
, I said I was grateful! I said that! I *did*!" She  
umped up and glared at her husband. "Look at  
me," she said with trembling insistence. Mr.  
Terrans averted his eyes and sipped his coffee.  
His wife pulled at her tangled, dirty hair, grind-  
ng her teeth. Then, swiftly and viciously, she  
pproached her husband and slapped him. The  
offee spilled from his mug onto the carpet and  
teambed briefly.

The slap obliterated the vagueness, the  
eaviness of the atmosphere. It sliced and shat-  
ered the mood, so that Margaret, startled and  
wounded by the break in reality, looked up to  
ee the wreckage. Fear animated her nerves,  
parked a more susceptible, alert consciousness.

Yet she looked up with a vapid expression.

Mrs. Terrans looked at Margaret and pointed at her. "See!" she cried excitedly. "Look at that face!"

It's really extraordinary that they are married, that they even met, Margaret thought. Isabelle rarely left her old home, and Mr. Terra was always either at work or at home. Occasionally he spent the evenings with colleagues. Even if they had met by some strange twist of fate, why did they marry? she wondered. Isabelle was a malingering wretch, melodramatic, self-pitying, moaning and groaning incessantly, probably driving whomever she lived with mad. Was she alone?

She couldn't understand why her father was not firm and direct with Isabelle as he was with everyone else. Why did he marry her? And she—why did she marry him. It made no sense and confused Margaret.

Like a damp darkness surrounding what is illuminated, there was the indefinite, unrecognized sentiment recognizing Isabelle's virtue. Margaret had not processed it yet. It was still floating in her mind, too bewildering to settle down and become concrete. There was the notion that Isabelle was not truly a brainless, malingering fool, that her behavior was a phase, an act. She was leaving behind that degradation and self-deception, those products of a deep

disturbance. Her complaints and snivels restrained, superficially, the familiar complaints and whines. Yet they had also become cries against the very existence of such wretchedness and the ways that had been consumed with it; not simply what made her wretched. There was a touch of poignancy in her new misery, unpolluted by her former pettiness and worldliness. Years later Margaret would perceive nobility in this suffering for suffering.

Margaret was ignorant of Isabelle's new protest against the world: she recognized only the symptoms of it. Each of Isabelle's words, once predictable and flat, had taken on a livelier, more biting quality. Since the day she had decided that she abhorred California, she spent her time raging, not moping. Her tone, once soft with sighs and lamentations, now stilled and pierced the air. It was as if through distillation her dissatisfaction, her tears, her self-pity—integral parts of her personality for years—were purifying into nothing other than anger, hard and distinct. The metamorphosis was awesome to witness.

Margaret awoke to the low drone of murmuring.

Groggy and disoriented, she rubbed her eyes clumsily and yawned. It was morning. Bars of mellow, warm light shone through the blinds. Dust particles floated serenely in the light.

Mrs. Terrans was standing in a dark cor-

ner of the room untouched by the early rays. She was in her white bathrobe, which drooped heavily on her body, reading intently, occasionally muttering to herself. "Oh yes, I remember Anna appears at the ball in her velvet gown. Each time she turned the page there was rapid, startling sound of paper sliding across paper, uncurling with a small snap beneath her finger.

The sound, after a while, severed Margaret from her cloudy dream completely. She sat up in bed and saw her step-mother closing the book slowly, her eyes lingering fondly on the front cover. Margaret opened her mouth to say something—what, she didn't know—but before she could Mrs. Terrans turned and said, "Good morning." She was in a good mood at the moment, reminiscing, smiling nostalgically. She traced her finger along the creased spines of Margaret's books. As she did, her face darkened. "Memories" she said quietly, "leave a bad taste in my mouth." Her lips moved imperceptibly. She tried to free herself from that other sphere of consciousness to offer Margaret one more smile, contrived smile, but a smile nevertheless) before leaving the room.

Margaret had lain down once more, her blanket covering all beneath the chin, wrapped about her body like a cocoon. She was thinking about what she might buy at the bookstore the

day. Lately, she had taken to purchasing classics and fat books on history and simply arranging them— sleek, shiny, untouched— on her bookshelf without any real intention of reading them cover to cover. There was only a weak desire, but it was artificial, overpowered by her lazy desire to lay quietly in bed as her thoughts, thick, simple, unwieldy, slowed into a hushed peace. But the peace was always broken by the sun creeping into her room, glowing on her eyelids so that a rude red pervaded her vision.

The sun was shining on her face now, so he rose, washed, changed, and went downstairs for breakfast, where Isabelle had prepared canaloupe for her. It was cool and fresh, and Margaret carefully picked the opalescent, sticky seeds from her slice before eating. Carl Terrans sat beside her reading the morning paper, cereal crunching noisily in his mouth.

"They've set fire to homes" Carl announced. He was referring to the terrible riots that had been raging for nearly a week now. Margaret was surprised to hear this; not because it seemed unlikely, but because she had simply forgotten about it. She had blocked out the violence, the mass beatings, the sweaty faces on TV with wild eyes.

"... And it's spread to the surrounding wildland. They're so busy trying to put out the burning fires and homes that they've forgotten

the trees." He looked up, to make sure that Margaret was listening.

"The forests are so dry, aren't they?" worried Isabelle, who was slicing more cantaloupe. "And they're so close, aren't they?"

"Yes" said Carl. "Pretty close. It might even reach here. But it's nothing to worry about," he said without much persuasion. "It's unlikely." Outside, the sky was without clouds, a faint blue tinged with the brown of smog and smoke. The trees waved in the breeze, and black crows were roosting on the roofs.

"You know," Isabelle persisted after a moment, "I wouldn't really mind if the fire reached here. Our place."

"Stop it" said Carl, repressing his frustration.

"It would burn our home, and we wouldn't have anything but the clothes on our backs. But that'd be okay, because we would need anything."

"Shut up," he commanded. His eyes were burning as he stared at the paper.

"We could start all over. From scratch." Isabelle put her knife down and ate one of the cantaloupe cubes, looking down at the count-

When it became humid a few days later, Isabelle began to think of the year she had spent in Africa, photographing the people, their run-down neighborhoods, and sometimes the wi-

fe. It was hot there too, like it was in California, but it was still different. In Africa, she was hot and content, and the landscape would shimmer with colors.

The riots had ended, and all the fires had been extinguished. The fires had never reached Margaret's street with its dry, bright homes, but the day after the riots had ended the people stepped out into the morning to find a fine layer of ash on their driveways, lawns, and trees. It rested on the green leaves and the waxy grass, and covered the dew on the flowers. But the yellow sun still blazed, and the sky flamed more intensely than ever over the landscape of ash sprinkled on the quiet and the living.

\* The Waves, by Virginia Woolf

## TENDERNESS

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A few years after I graduated from college I began to consider seriously becoming a full time translator, or dividing my time between translating and teaching evenly. At the time I was unemployed, but I knew that I could easily attain a position at a Chinese or Vietnamese university teaching English, French, or Spanish.

I had passed through college with the notion of teaching English literature in a private New England high school until I felt confident enough to support myself with my writing alone. But that first month after graduation I was a complete person. I'd always thought I'd publish a volume or two of stories or poems and teach English or creative writing on the side. But later the phrases had left me, and the solitary poet of music began to possess me instead.

I was an excellent writer at times. At times the elements of my phrase-making would converge without any conscious deliberation to produce a really fine, often beautiful work. It was entirely chance, though. Unlike my fellow struggling writers at the university, I couldn't seem to pour myself into creation and construction. Nor did I want to. I didn't know at the time that what really obstructed self-immersion was the suspicion that self-contained strands of poetry were

more perfect than any finely honed whole work. self-contained as in a lyric strand with a life of s own. Later on it would mean contained in he self.

I backed out of the teaching position one month after graduation. My parents were so alarmed by this unpredictable and foolish career move, the tired blank expression with which I resented the news and received their censure, that the critical attacks died after three days. My mother became frightened of me, even.

As for my father, he understood everything: he had been forbidden to see again his son from another marriage when he married my mother. His son was three. When I rejected the boy he became convinced that his descendants could be cursed, or at least haunted.

My imminent marriage, I'm sure, influenced my decision to become a translator. The proposal itself was not the will of two individuals to alter lives, for better or for worse; it was an event that presented itself to us. But it wasn't that I'd foreseen marriage upon first meeting my husband; not at all. It was as if we were embarrassed by the situation, wanting to laugh to relieve the fear of intimacy, ready to say, Here you are. Wanting to laugh because it was silly that the essays in French he turned in never mentioned the assigned topic, but elaborated on his interests and aspirations—so clearly phony. Then he asked

me out for dinner and I was angry at the fortune of our fated relationship when it was not true love.

He was my student but five years older than me. I still don't know what brought him to China, but I do know that he was an idle philosopher at the time. During our first dinner date he told me he liked Chinese women. He was surprised to learn that I was not Chinese, and asked, "You are not comfortable with your boyfriend am I right?" I was still angry, and now annoyed at his smugness. I realized later it was partly a facade. I treated him with the same detachment I did the other students the next day, and he did not seem to care. Then during the last week of classes he approached me with much sincerity and tenderness in his face and asked me out for dinner once more. I was angrier than ever, and as he was telling me about his plans to move to the States I could only think about how his physical charm and his moody handsome features were evanescent, and that if we were to have children they would probably be ugly and slobbering.

The poems kept coming and my writing improved vastly. They were subtle in style, perceptively fluid, original in tone. I was pleased with them but bored. When I told my father I wanted to drop creative writing and become a translator, he was quite pleased. He believed

hat my life would be more fulfilling that way. My mother was still furious with me for planning to marry a Swedish man who grinned during stern occasions, laughed at others' silences, and claimed he was marrying me because I would be easy to live with. But he was genuinely kind to me, and she was furious mainly because he was white.

I always told my husband that what one must remember in life is the epiphanies that flash out once. Events are important, yes, they change lives but can occur to anyone. I am beginning to regret clinging steadfastly to that philosophy because now I can barely remember what he looks like. Six years after we married he ran off with a humble Swedish woman. I'll show you, he said, I can do whatever I want or don't want. And just as my father wished in his heart that I teach at the private school in New England, I desired that he do the outrageous thing he promised. I began to feel near-aversion for him because he resented my anticipation.

His fading face: it's the same with all the foreign landscapes I've seen, breathed in. Once could distinguish between the heat in China and the heat in Indonesia; would experience a French freeze in different nerves than a Brazilian breeze. But now nouns have more weight for me: a tree is simply a tree. Long after he left me and I had produced many first-rate translations I was alone

and a mess of unrecorded sentiments.

My mother secretly approved of my marriage, was glad and expectant, after the initial month of outrage. She found herself attracted to him and when he spoke to her she would envy herself as his bride. She approved privately because she wanted to experience him vicariously through me, her flesh and blood. When she felt her time was near she made me promise that once he returned from his photography assignment in China we would have children.

I'll never understand why my father married my mother; she demanded too much and offered little. She insisted that once they marry he never see his son or his ex-wife again. And although he kept his word, she continued to harass him about his past life when she knew he was faithful and devoted to me, his only daughter.

What exactly was the connection between choosing a career in translating and marriage? I felt that now that I was going to marry my husband it was time to stop linking the phrases together like stones on a necklace.

Once when I was visiting my parents my father began to rant about the way I had led my life. He swore that if I didn't remarry to a man with at least black hair and lidless eyes he would torment me as a wraith for the rest of my days. I promised I'd remarry. He thought I was lying but at the time I really began to consider remar-

ng. But I didn't know where my husband was,  
nd told him that.

We had been alone in the room and when  
emerged I found my mother in tears. You told  
him but not me, she sobbed. Why didn't you  
ell me he'd left you? All this time, I'd been hop-  
ng... Her features were so malleable and sad,  
her eyes so naive and selfish and watery. I'd  
ever felt such immense tenderness for her; and  
was more than the forced intimacy of birth.

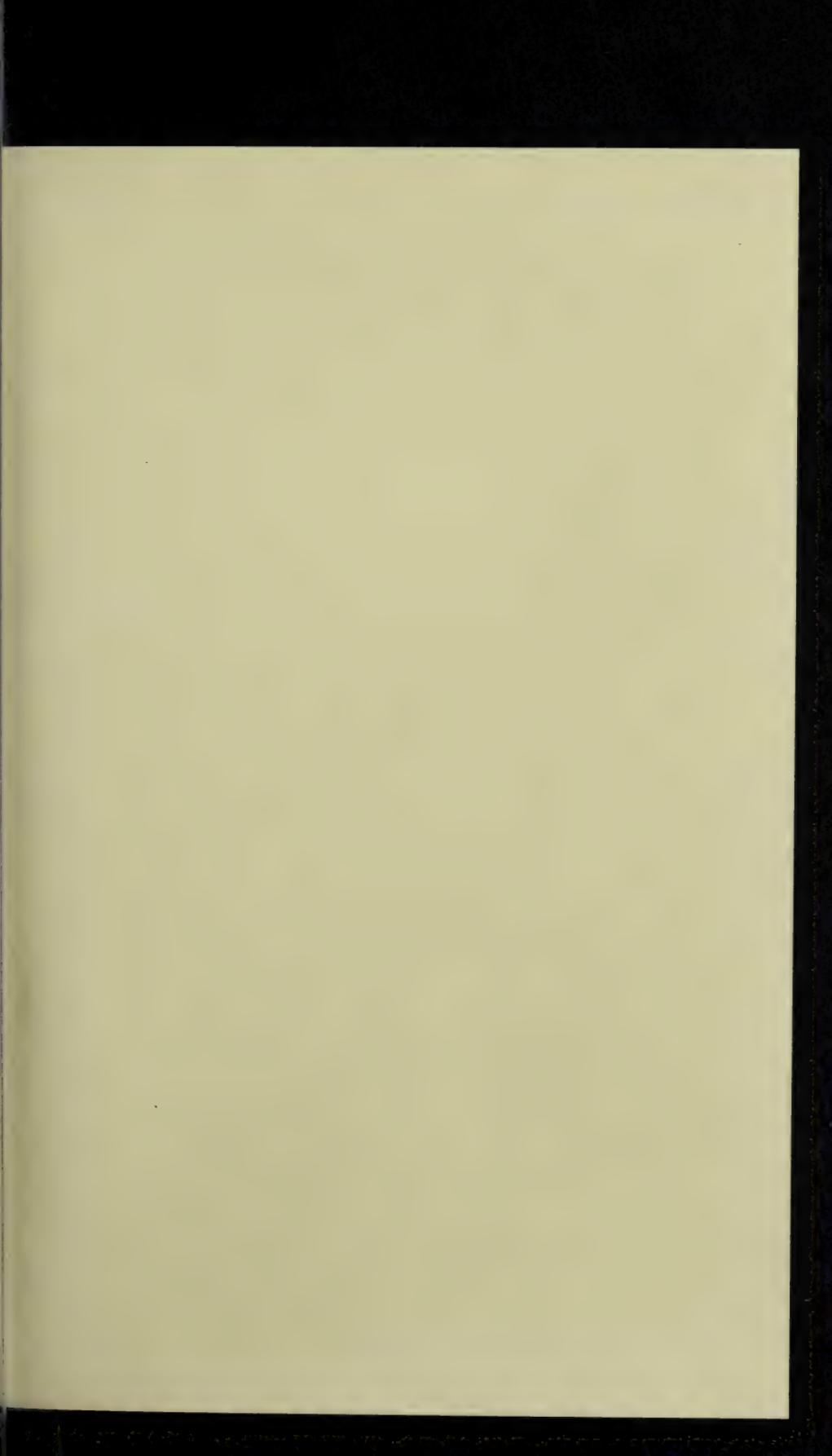
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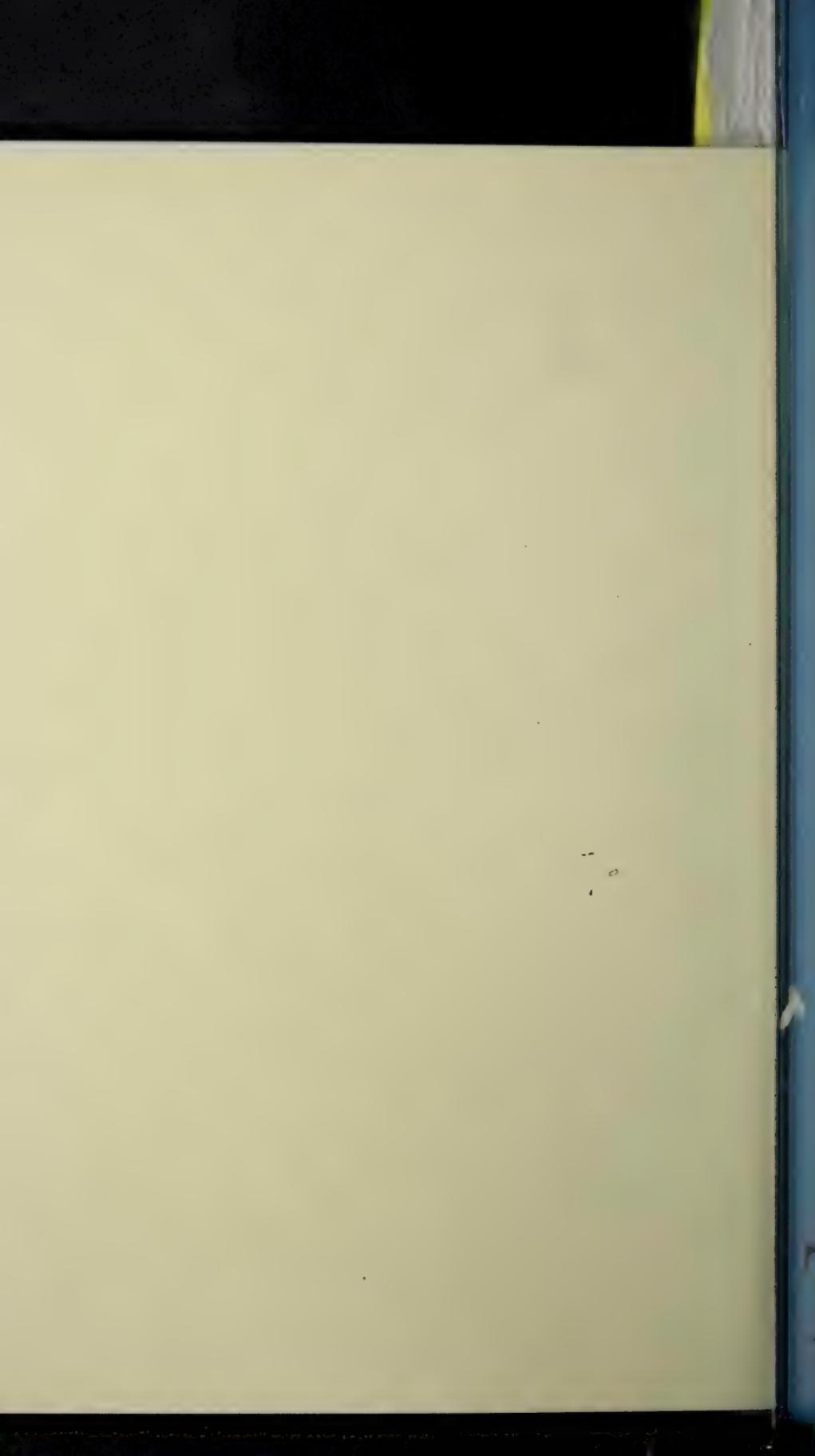
The Chapbook was designed to showcase author who has distinguished him or herself in the Courant. It is a collection of the author's published and previously unpublished work.

We hope you will enjoy this selection of Maureen Chun's writing..

Cover Art, "Study of 'The Longing for Happiness  
Fulfilled in Poetry,' from the Beethoven Frieze by  
Gustav Klimt" by Grace Rollins.







Winter Term 1997  
Volume V, Number 1



# The Courant



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# Introduction: Cadence

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Poems mature and poets grow to them. Poems can make a poet grow just to complete them. In the Fall 1996 issue of *The Courant*, several new voices find meaning in music. The names are striking: Kate Nesin, Caitlin Berrigan, Christina Richardson, Caitlin Mulhern. Is it a secret society, this colloquy of alliterative voice under the editorial aegis of Caroline Whitbeck and Kate Zangrilli? At the risk of implying that the poems these four women produce are even remotely about the same thing, let me say that what strike me about all their work is the evocation of mood in a music that is more often than not as still and sad as grandmother's favorite ballads from the 30's, dusty in brittle brown sleeves.

Consider the halting cadence in Christina Richardson's vignette "That Cycle of Leaves":

We drive silent  
down a street overhung with branches  
and sunlight drops down from each hard consoling leaf  
to each its own shadow as they smack across the hood  
they seem to know they wave  
Goodbye Goodbye  
remind me of a murder, as they all seem to stand over  
your sun blanket  
they won't they won't  
"So this is where you live."  
He says—but he knows without telling cause he can  
see the books  
in their cases, each handkerchief in its fold, the hand  
lotion on the counter and the piano's keys  
He drops me onto the lawn.  
Later I'll play some slow music—like a light left on,  
parent waiting up

It makes my shoulders shudder.  
It makes me cry.

Christina qualifies the tranquil image of leaves dropping from sunlight to their own shadows with the odd “smack” as if to announce that this poem will not render the event sentimental. These are *hard* consoling leaves and he will drop her onto the lawn. The rhythm of the poem shudders to its staccato of declarative sentences. Striking in this poem is the daring glimpse at the man’s imagination of the speaker, itself a betrayal of poet’s artifice. They are not necessarily flattering images as the pristine order of things seems to suggest a self-imposed loneliness, perhaps even an indulgence in feeling or at least solitary music. Handkerchiefs and books are perhaps escapes into emotion for emotion’s sake or at least the privacy of feeling evoked by one’s own experiences. The hand lotion which smooths the skin and the precision of the piano’s keys implying that they are fused, the music and the hands that make it, is the drama of leaves, sun turning to its own shadow, in that place where the speaker lives.

Christina is more explicit in “The Palm Leaf,” a parable of the poet’s art as an experience touched by her womanhood. Again, one detects some ironic distancing in the measure of this woman’s artistic calling. The poet rather summarily enlists nature as instrument “as an owl night is just a syncopation.” The repetition here is not a desperate note, but a sardonic one:

Confusing purge with thirst  
until life and anger is just a

reflection of a reflection of a reflection

Using an image of denial often associated with young people, particularly woman, Christina implies that this poet must create a aesthete’s matyrdom that ultimately must be a tautology, the world reflecting and justifying her passionate tortured art. This image is particularly ironic given the announcement at the outset that this poet wants to be the “well-fed artist/Or poet—who are you to ob-

ject?" Throughout the poem, Christina implies that this poet is not honest with herself about her motives, and that the result is troubling, yes, but a bit funny too. In the "act" of groping for a man who can become God, she "stirs the palm leaf with her words." A perfect image here and a great example of how much one inventive young poet can get out of a leaf in two poems, the palm leaf is the ideal object, a reflection of her own hand and the secrets mapped out in "veins of veins of veins." So, the closing couplets are comic in their irony and naughtiness:

Even she cannot predetermine  
the course of death or love

Although it's a great job I might add  
Her hand gets sweaty on the stem

That's right. Even she can't conquer the world she's carefully constructed in her own easy art, in her own image of herself as artist. "Although it's a great job" neatly refers both to the ability to predetermine her own life and to the pretense of art with which she'll try to do it. "Her hand gets sweaty on the stem" might refer both to her fashioning a self in the enterprise of making the world a big mirror or to her sexual yearnings realized when putting the God at her side as soon as she clutters the mirror's frame with all the proper woodland creatures.

Caitlin Berrigan's poem "Using Force" approaches the idea of writing poetry in the same terms but in a radically different tone. The persona in her poem is confident and aggressive. Poetry is nature muscled into the shape of a child who needs tough love to survive and shine. A good poetic sensibility works the language on its own terms. Caitlin refuses to settle for conventional images. Rather, she subverts them, taking the risk that she might not be able to salvage them. The language rises in part because the voice is strong and clear:

I am going to force you out

out at rickety hours of the night  
and not look you in your purple-brown baby's face  
until you are blue with breath and white with life

Immediately following the birth, the poet "suffocates" the child in precise images of lost innocence and death out of which she fashions beauty:

and I am going to spit you on the ground with all  
the mushy cakes of split rotting apples and  
the dangerous gold of yellow jackets that decorate them  
and when you are stung with their venom and poked  
by their black high heels and antennae spears I might  
lift you and your tattered sleeves

The wonderful interior rhymes create a music that promises the poet will convert the challenges of a women's life into a kind of steely feminine beauty: spit, split, lift, and in support rotting, jackets, tattered, sleeves and heels, pokes and black and cakes. Failed baking, dangerous gold, high heels that sting all suggest a womanhood that can kill with precision. Indeed, the striking image of the child carried back to the house in "my shoe with the innards suffocating your/sweet scented air of lightness" implies the sum total of a life that is too small. It is out of this smallness, however, that Caitlin raises the child/poem when she reaches a kind of climax of creation: "until I reach my zenith, where my legs rank and whine/and my back finds shadows to be pillow'd on/and I see the density of the sky." Sacred prayers flash out "your beauty and your beaten, burnt skin" almost as if the molding process is a potterer's. Ironically, the result is a "ruddy foreign face," but the poet has wanted all along to create child/poem independent from herself and the very means she's used to make it.

Elsewhere, Caitlin pours lives into little containers betraying quiet desperation. "Crowned With Pink Compact" pins the wife/lover to the mechanical ballerina's axis spinning in a music box, turning to a quantity rather than a quality: "185 pounds of man."

He is not greater than the sum of his parts; in fact, his one connection is metonymic, the scoring of the surfaces in “Using Force” now details empty of spirit:

kissing the scrape of his moustache  
each pore pouring rough black  
and each lip a red roll of a slug

The synesthesia of the first line, the combination of taste and touch is not ecstatic but grotesque. Indeed, the man tastes her, nearly swallows her, his stomach a globe: in effect, their “routined and dry” love making her whole world. The music in the poem’s closing line summarizes the wry, bitter tone of the poem:

and she could lie, patterned panties  
removed at the thigh.

Her life is a self-deception, the no doubt delicate design of her panties of no interest to him and certainly of no consequence to their relationship. Consider that he is not present. Their condition exists in and of itself, defined only by a clinical observation about where they once were.

The crown in “Graduation: Hurling Through the Rite of Passage” is a cap that will be a “toy for her tiny brown children. This time, the speaker is a mother watching her daughter graduate “premature.” While the situation is not novel, the fear pervading this poem is palpable because what the mother sees in her daughter’s future is her own present, and she herself is responsible for this future. If the daughter’s “split-faced grin” is the same “worn smile” she strapped on her mouth throughout the—premature—years, the daughter learned it from the mother who tries to “clap and hoot away our fears and doubts/as we beamed, beamed, beamed.” The repetition sounds like a hammer blow. Sound plays hard “Graduation.” The daughter “houses accents of,

car shows, drop-outs, baby photos, blonde curls...  
eyeliner heavy as tar, early marriages and thread-thin styles  
(alcohol cut down the back throats  
of me)  
burgundy-black sugar koolaid.

The mother is thinking of Sylvia Plath's American 50's, when a wife just might be a function of tract housing and automated hearths. Dressed in black, the mother seems to sense a funeral at hand, her daughter's. The cruelest cut is that she's trained her daughter to sleep through time travel and so the daughter shuts her mother out. The daughter has learned the "grinding affectation of nice/young woman."

Like Caitlin Berrigan, Kate Nesin wants to recreate the sounds of her mother's generation's youth. Kate's tone and the tenor of her images reveal the wizened perspective from which she regards her childhood's fantasies of her mother's youth. She is clear throughout that she is remembering what she used to feel. The poem develops on two sets intertwining images: surprising weather in the summer, and brittle things. Nesin brings them together quite literally in music. The summer before she was born was hot, the summer after "bordering on cold." Kate remembers this "fierce juxtaposition" by running "metal pieces like forks/along a metal rim." The tines of the forks on metal anticipate the quicker clip of stiletto heels on summer sidewalks during successively warmer summers. Kate cleverly transforms that sound into a creaking violin or viola, or even a viola da gamba. The increasing size and of course deepening resonance of the imagined sound suggests both the fragility of the music played and the sense of lightness moving to weight implied in heels that will shrink to the size of men's dull sneakers and loafers, puns I am tempted to accept later in the poem. For Kate as a child hints the "fabulously high, high heels" are worn as a stay of execution or worse, leveling. The poem's structured sound insists on that ate:

...wore fabulously high, high heels with their white skirts,  
walking next to their men,  
dwarfed in sneakers and loafers which didn't shine.  
I thought it was to let the shoes  
last longer, the heel being longer,  
wearing down, down, taking years  
to reach the flatness of my shoes,  
many summers until they wore through.

The repetition at first mirrors her excitement, “wore” linked with “white.” But the harsh sounds to follow figuratively wear that image down. The reflective tone captured in the qualified remembrance “last longer, the heel being longer” actually finds a rhythm that slows with what must have been a revelation settling like years on the little girl. “The heel being longer” faintly echoes the certainty of the original sense and the “down, down” falls like premature leaves in summer bordering on cold. “Wore through” collapses “wore fabulously” and raises the ominous question, Wore through to what?

The speaker vows to wear them year round because she likes the shape of legs in “such built up shoes.” That vow cannot be kept because the stilettos will snap, the sound of the heels reminding her “of the crack of trees,/in nipping weather and wind,/whether in the summer months,/or the winter ones.” “Weather” and “whether” reminds us that chance itself is unavoidable. Kate knows what is inevitable in that fragile height the comes down slow through the years or hard in sudden weather.

The women in Caitlin Mulhern’s poems have weathered hard times, but they whip-smart in their own experience. “33rd Street” features a speaker as strong as the mother/poet in “Using Force.”

I have no remorse  
lover's, buyer's, seller's  
I have no regret  
morning, afternoon, night  
cause I have it all'

## I got that memory of good living

True, what follows is a litany of unkind rendezvous with men all of which are reduced to marks left on her: "visine addiction," "disconnected phones," "mirror mooning," and "roof passion." The sheer energy of the poem, however, powers through these memories of sexual awakening and loss because the speaker has initiated all of them. The simple listing and repetition of "I got it" demonstrates the speaker's hunger for the experiences, the bad with the good.

However, the real victory for this woman is her assertion at the end:

over those lessened by destiny and speechless advice  
that somehow named me wise  
but I got it and I'm glad

Unlike women around her who allowed fate and convention's silent judgment to lessen them, she somehow achieved the wisdom they borrowed or accepted, and now she is wise despite speechless advice. Caitlin continues this line of thinking in "9 Years" where we find a woman splitting away from her peers who have "mastered" the art of making proper perfect. Like a genius in a cul de sac pacing behind faux medieval raised basement windows, this woman has learned feng shui and "spanish like a madwoman." What she knows, of course, is her own music: "that piano/in the dark man." She is a "parragon [sic]/of nude midnights":

on stools  
in showers  
on diving boards

That is her music she finds in the dark man. She transforms the wet, high places in her domesticity into exotic zones. The poem deceives in its simplicity for the pride attained her differs from that which chokes her and others. Yes, she is obsessed with the obsession that rules other women, but I think that Caitlin wants us to

believe that the speaker herself is obsessed with her own obsession, the difference being that the former is an obsession with a woman is supposed to be and the latter is an obsession with a woman can become.

I have not touched on all the poems by these poets in this issue. In fact, I may have neglected the best poem. Poetry alone does not bring these women together. And these four women are not the only reason to read *The Courant*. Kim Ballard and Katherine Gilbert, two women who are veterans to these pages contribute powerfully. Caroline's poetry hovers over these new poems. Kate's creation Kate Cassidy, re-drafter of the world's architecture in photography brings us full circle for a series of Kate Nesin's photographs offers a stirring closing image. Recreating the child's game, "here-is-the-church, this-is-the-steeple," Kate shoots a sequence that freeze the steps against a black wall across which a sharp angle of light narrows to black when we open the doors and see all the people. Don't be fooled by the developing image. The wall darkens, the hands become translucent.

The Smitty Prize for the Fall 1996 issue of *The Courant* goes to Christina Richardson for her poem "The Palm Leaf" and Caitlin Berrian for her poem "Using Force." Two poems about poetry and women.

*Craig Thorn*

# Using Force

---

I am going to force you out  
out at rickety hours of the night  
and not look you in your purple-brown baby's face  
until you are blue with breath and white with life

and I am going to spit you on the ground with all  
the mushy cakes of split rotting apples and  
the dangerous gold of yellow jackets that decorate them  
and when you are stung with their venom and poked  
by their black high heels and antennae spears I might  
lift you and your tattered sleeves

carry you in my shoe with the innards suffocating your  
sweet scented air of lightness  
until I reach my zenith, where my legs rank and whine  
and my back finds shadows to be pillow'd on  
and I see the density of the sky and bite the brick with  
my eyes  
and then

I might pull you out by your arms, roll you  
onto your stomach and onto your feet and recite your  
sacred prayers  
flash out your beauty and your beaten, burnt skin

because you are a poem and you have to be hard  
and you have to have been everywhere, every color  
singed by every poison and rashed by every texture  
then and only then will I speak of you,  
look into your ruddy foreign face

eye by pregnant eye.

# The Palm Leaf

---

She wants to be the well-fed artist  
Or poet—who are you to object?

She sees the moon as a tool for a gail  
as an owl night is just a syncopation

Confusing purge with thirst  
until life and anger is just a

reflection of a reflection of a reflection

Groping for the man who can lift her  
or lean in one breath and become God

She stirs the palm leaf with her words  
the palm leaf fans with veins

of veins of veins of veins

Even she cannot predetermine  
the course of death or love

Although it's a great job I might add  
Her hand gets sweaty on the stem

*Christina Richardson*

# Searching for What Was In My Face

---

The writer hunts for his prey  
an idea for the poem  
Frustrated with writer's block  
Ant-boogie hits the streets  
searching for a thought

He walks through  
he concrete suburb  
and first comes to a bodega  
he center of many previous ideas  
Maybe an ice cold Malta will be the remedy  
Ant goes to the back of the bodega  
peruses the Alpo and Goya product  
aisle to find his salvation  
but when he cracks open the chest  
he discovers no Malta Goya or Vitarroz  
that would stimulate his mind

Even more frustrated  
he starts to walk  
forever it seems  
towards his abuelita's house  
which is in C&C territory  
On his way  
he passes by similar street corners  
and hears la musica del Bronx  
lively salsa and merengue beats  
being blasted from La Mega  
mixed with the hardest hip-hop from  
Hot 97  
fused with the classic soul of Kiss  
All of which can't compete  
with a quiet hustler's piece  
that Big Willies kick in a fiend's ear

on every corner  
What'chu want kid?  
Blue caps red caps  
Just as solid as my naps  
Nickel dime  
Guaranteed to fuck you up in time  
Snow blow  
What you wanna know  
Yeah I got some crack  
5-0 coming betta watch yo'back

All Ant wants is his abuelita's  
arroz con gandules for his idea  
not these hoes  
disadvantaged youth  
offering things that even  
Big Ant wants to reject  
for prices he can't refuse  
He recognizes the stringy one  
in the pom-pom shorts  
and dirty halter top  
She was in his homeroom  
Her eyes carry a lot of luggage  
and many tear riddened nights  
Danm Ant says  
as he hears the rattle of the #2 train above him

Where are the gardens of John Adams  
He reaches abuelita's projects  
for his arroz con gandules  
In the lobby  
the jibaro's eyes call him  
to hear his lamentos  
His eyes contained the sadness  
of a whipped dog and  
his wrinkled skin and thick fingers  
revealed many days en el campo

Jibaro grumbles some Spanish  
unknown to Ant  
Tu sabe quien es Albizu Campo... Libertad o Muerte...  
    America es un grupo  
de maricones... Viva Puerto Rico y la revolucion  
It shakes Ant because  
finally the truth had been told

He makes his way up the stairs  
and doesn't stop to notice the customaries  
the hieroglyphics on the wall  
the pile of baby ca ca on the 2nd floor  
the young couple that makes out on the 5th floor  
(he heard that she's due soon)  
the burnt hallway of the 6th floor  
and now finally the sweet smell of the rice and peas  
quietly sitting in the pot  
Abuelita greets him at the door  
and the journey is over for the idea  
The poem wrote itself

*Anthony Morales*

# Livingston Street

Sidewalks of time and shattering conveyor belts  
In the mail room of destiny the live fur dances with the  
felts  
Pencils of madness write on paper of peace  
Where radioactive mice eat governmental cheese  
And I don't know what I'm gonna do  
"Cuz an alligator bit me ; took ma goddamn shoe  
A self-denying pilot is flying overhead  
A polyester prostitute lying in his bed

I'm tired , so tired of the institutions  
Who insult intelligence when they're supposed to uphold  
it  
It's flustering , frustrating , what do you say  
'Bout the polysemous messages they convey?  
I thought about quittin' , I thought about movin'  
I thought about winnin' , I thought about losin'  
I ain't givin' up  
I ain't goin' down  
I ain't gonna shatter like the shattering psyche  
Of the sad clown

'Cuz things come together and things fall apart  
But none of that matters in the matters of the heart  
Foundations remain where buildings collide  
When dead surrealism was washing in with the tide  
The stench of the devil's gym bag lingers  
Rancid aroma attracting bees with their stingers  
Brain waves dissolve when they meet cathode rays  
Two opposing wavelengths so neither of them stay  
And is that the way you come to a resolution  
When your head goes ahead to an automatic illusion  
Fly in the sea , swim in the sky  
And I'm tired , so tired of rolling on by and by

And I don't know what I'm gonna do  
'Cuz an alligator bit me ; gave me them Nigger-Rican  
blues  
A self-denying pilot is flying overhead  
A polyester prostitute lying in his bed

*Yaqub Prowell*

# Boston

---

I'm trippin'  
underneath  
the fog breath  
of my bleary toes  
because  
they are white  
with 28 degree  
exhilaration  
and shocked  
at their colorless faces  
against the sewer  
water mirror  
because my open-toed shoes  
took the roof off their heads  
and I left them naked and screaming  
like little babies born of mother foot

*Caitlin Mulhern*



*Ariel Lambe*

# “The restless apparent ghoul...”

the restless apparent ghoul  
moves across smooth smooth floor  
his shole shakes  
his soul bakes  
mind split wide open

mind-fryin sweetmeat gatherin man  
gallivant and spin  
and the finger went in!  
you got the dog man?  
and the answer be yes.

blowhard crabby in the  
television cemetary.  
olive oil grease  
and he slides!  
slides to the side  
in the crimes of the mind

*Zack Waldman*

# Listening to Music I've Made

---

Listening to music I've made  
(hearing the notes I played)  
Listening to a bleating ghost  
with his throat torn up and frayed

Well I'm hearing myself think-  
and describing it in verse  
is like trying to make your  
children breed  
It's like tattooing a supple  
heart on your own forehead-  
the perversity kills me

I'm watching my own blood spill out  
It's dark maroon and syrupy  
pouring down my chin and  
marring the spinning spokes.  
It pools on the pavement.

I'm gutting myself  
the hair on my forearms glistening-  
then immersed in the September  
lake water, which smacks my  
chest, chills and chides me  
in crests of hums and swells-  
waves to wash the blood away  
waves to wash my shaggy hair

I'm listening to music I made  
my guts on the floor, soggy and displayed

*Will Glass*

# Love in a Panic

---

a bluebeard and a blackwidow  
stopped at lunch to steep in tea sometimes  
breaking the cut glass, the fine goblet  
with all the shrillest: "there will be no more of you!  
no spoons, no cups, no knives."

it all resounding great like a Brahma bull  
with baby's breath breathing  
(the economics of you—two windbags)  
or bellows

and oh baby in the gold chain been hanging  
loose Lucy around the bankclerk and all  
those dollars Bill's been kissing your pinkies  
rings, darling, and other things you haven't gotten

yet! I bit you once, like gold  
just to see who you were, what harvested beneath  
your surface earth  
(all mining, strip-mining)

and I lost you once at the backdoor  
broke your ankles and shoved you  
down a flight of stairs—listening  
to your resounding crash, an avalanche  
of icetrays

and when you sprayed to a stop,  
I had to coop and kiss  
all your darkened underclothes,  
that beat breast warmth  
of pectorals where once we kept a keel and flew  
or a great slippery heart like a peach pit

so dark, dank and dark, rank  
armpitted the lost salt where the sea  
goes to break or to die, intertidal  
with a crab or a scallop lopped upon the crag rocks—  
nipple rooks, two crows who stoop and stare—beady

toweling then after his breath  
the lace it pulls, the sprays of old flowers  
it puffs and doilies in the air—an old lady's  
bedroom Jesus dust ruffle

and then the all-encompassing helldark below  
rooted axis to axis, a tight gape like a star,  
a pull or a pole hotwired like a tree or a lamppost

boy, buoyant above the dashing young rocks for you,  
heave heel of red wet muscled straps  
bounding your snail guts, projectile stomach, sex, and  
tongue—

a red alert or a spiked drink  
horsing around stirrumped to the buckles of your hips  
where Sex, divining rod,  
slung nose-down like a dog, quivers  
and all points after it.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

# A memento mori for my favorite dead dragon

---

          sorry that me iliac crest is not perfectly rounded,  
          not smooth white bone glistening in the morning sun  
          sorry that my words aren't as sweet as the ones you think  
          of;  
but that's to be expected.  
and your eyes search, wandering curious brown orbs o  
          disdain  
sorry, that you couldnt seem to locate me in your rod  
          and cones  
at any rate.  
the sun is shining, the day is bright. you're makin  
          melanin, and  
as I write and you rot and a final protective umbrella  
          being tautly stretched  
over your skin  
sorry, that you're done and I've just begun, dragon.

*Zack Waldman*

## “Microwave dinner for the cold black sinner...”

---

microwave dinner for the cold black sinner  
and the dress is worn, my legs not warm  
styrofoam box on the greengrass lawn  
hepcat dawn and my mind is gone  
and help the poor boy who's lost his shoes  
help that urchin sing his blues

the big dog cries cause his master died  
save the baby, the gorilla cried

“It wasn't the smart slang of today's youth, but the polite  
family talk of my childhood.”

*Zack Waldman*

# It Blushed

a little snug around the heels, she was, a lozenge  
wishing comic pages and cough tonics  
through the Super Marvel Man of Ages  
who might come crashing through the window, now  
at any minute

though she is tired!  
of what, love? the spooning weight  
of eggcreams, of an elbow pad  
or an eyelid—when saucy, winking saucers, poor  
lovebug! she sidesteps and spills

wet ragging of days! baby on her knees, again  
baby on the elbow grease, again,  
it is lemon scented

like the Lone Star, once her lover  
a Seven League Boot Landstrider  
who left her  
for a sugar cube  
in the woolly red midwestern  
night where electric hamburger boy  
flexes stretches of freeway thigh

with the radio  
antenna singing like his skin,  
condensation trembling like a lip, like  
an ice cube in a wax cup

where she, slung against the automatic  
doorlock sat cold with the car alarm  
leaning on the steering  
wheel to catch  
the clutch up in her teeth—

and here! she is  
hounded by cherry stems and reptilean  
cocktail napkins, the red of ambulettes

and Time stuck in the tines  
of forks, the instantaneous geraniums  
smashed in the crosswalks,

the Marvel Man stops, fiddles with his watch fob

and she is left leaning on every periphery, every  
window pane

she shoves her tongue down his street  
she sucks off the stop sign.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

## **“Candy McGrew lay her head against the earth...”**

Candy McGrew lay her head against the earth, pressed her ear against the folds of ant mountains, and waited to hear its heartbeat. It had one, she knew well, and it was much stronger than anyone's own.

She listened often now. The time had long grown old for jarring the firebugs with their paned wings, who alighted over the weather vanes and the chimney stacks to break the night if the stars flickered out. Behind the scrapyard where robots and spaceship went to die, the dandelions had kept their heads on for a while. There were times for her to listen. No one came to force the guts of oatmeal or spoonfuls of oil and vinegar apple juice down her throat. No one came to tuck the noose of blanket around her neck. There was no one to leave their arms around her, and no one to ever tell her that they loved her.

Candy had ladled many secrets from the air as she walked the line the grey catkins made along the road, past the shack where her parents used to live, and where a wiry man now gnawed at charred legs and took frying pans to the back of rats and wife alike.

Candy knew how the shadows trembled with laughter, for they were always taller than you at birthday parties when they measured against notches in the wall. She had been told how to walk on the ceiling and how to keep your pennies and slingshots in your pocket when you did. She had heard the beating wings of the leaves that chased your shoelaces, and she could pick out the fire hydrants and hedges they hid behind when you looked for them. She knew where the ghosts camped by the railroad tracks, crying with the train as it shrank against the horizon. She had heard the air closing over the sick beds and the wheelchairs of the rest home, and she had heard the cracks that whittled their way past padlocks and window shutters as they made their way into other peoples' hearts. She had heard time end and then, burdened and weary, begin again. The

was only one thing Candy wished to hear, double-fisted, eye-squeezing wished, as the grass spoke to her ear and the wind and the earth: the footsteps of someone coming to stroke her hair from her wet cheek, to keep her cheek dry forever, and to hold her and maybe even love her just for once. And then the silence for Candy McGrew would never be again.

Candy knew a place away from time, knotted into the worn threads of subway rail, behind the unscrubbed ears of earth. It was a place far away from closed fists and hot dog stands and it was all for her.

Many a day was forgotten watching all the people go by on the way to the subway cars, top-spinning so fast that you lost where their feet ended and the road began. Even God rushed by, with dove on wing and candy canes, for the only way anyone has to get where they need to is on the subway, after all. They all had wisdom for her, maybe so, but it was all strands of alphabet soup through her ears. No one liked to see little girls with dirty fingernails and missing-toed shoes sitting alone on subway benches. They couldn't see Mrs. Green though. No one could.

Mrs. Green wore church-going shoes, with a shadow of a beard to tickle all the pews. Those shoes had a squeak known to the angels that she had been singing to and believing in all the while. Her door had a welcome mat that was clean no matter how often you came by, and she could wiggle her ears. She always had water boiling just beneath her nose, and the steam and bubbles held jockey races through your fingers and out the kitchen door. Mrs. Green would braid Candy's hair snug against her ears, and it held her better than anyone really could, even if they tried. They skipped rope in the parlor next to the fish tank and spoke sonnets to the wind to carry to lonely people. Mrs. Green wasn't afraid of climbing trees, and she was in love with the night as much as Candy was, and she lit her fireworks and birthday candles from the flame of the stars. She never had to sneeze and she never lost a single tooth. She could have gone to Greenland or Tanzania, but she never would because she would miss Candy too much. Mrs. Green would cry for her so

hard that no gift, no kiss, or book of paper dolls, or banana in her cereal bowl could end it. Someone would cry for her, see, someone would.

But sometimes Candy wondered if she was clutching the elbow of a shadow, or holding the hand of empty air, or whether the silence had taken Mrs. Green away.

Candy listened, as Sunday yawned. Puddles of obituarie were washed away by the rain, because the Steptoe Standard couldn't make it's way to the promised porch after the paper boy had gone. She needn't open her eyes, because there was nothing left to see. The tent where the revivals were held would be loose-tooth hanging on the mountains' edge, collapsing into itself as everyone left. They would be hiding corn-on-the-cob and watermelon moon under their jacket tails and petticoats. The only ones who ever stayed through amen and amen, were the nest of hornets who lived in patch above the circus ring of pews. The ribs of the valley were covered in unshaven piles of slag from the smelter. It was too ugly a town to jump rope on the corners or shoot marbles along the alleys. Too ugly to look at again. Steptoe never changed, but Candy had heard all about it. About how all Earth was a sink of dirty plates crashing into one another to form mountains, and she knew how you could end change with wrinkle creams and dead watches.

It was all silly to her though, and it would never do her any good. Johnny would always love Susie on the wall of the bathroom stall, and Bach's voice would always be different over the radio, and no one would ever come for her. It felt as though someone were web-weaving over her heart as she waited, and she was worried that soon she would have no heart left.

She had crossed lakes of sewer drain in Steptoe, frozen over in mud and ice and had passed the fruit bowl of used pick-ups at Fred's Emporium. She had kept both hands as she skirted past the grizzly dog who guarded the pirates of the pawn shop and she had stepped in the wells of gum and chew and cusses in the entrance to Jackal Jerry's Casino. It was all worth it, though, to go to the bo

One House. It had no welcome mat or porch beacon but you knew well enough to come in. There were no real doors in the No One House anymore, only the veins of cobweb that visiting spiders had given. There were no real rooms either, but she was sure of the kitchen; it smelled far too much like burnt grease and oven range. And maybe a bedroom that smelled of a lady's song and lace. It had a balcony in spitting distance of its neighbors and shutters on the windows that let in the moon once it was invited. The floors whined once in a while if you tapdanced on them or dared to tie your shoe, but Candy wasn't ever afraid they would let her fall. She knew that house too well and it knew her.

So, she strangled her feet between the bars of the balcony and waited until Sunday shut its eyes and then she went inside to sleep next to the end of the day.

She opened her eyes just in time to make it down the rusty ladder and there in a heap at the bottom was a boy. His knees were praying with the ladder rail and had the most admirable grass stains she'd ever seen. His head was in his hands, and all she could see were the beams of hair coming through his fingers. She reached for his hand to see his eyes. "Are you lost?" she wondered.

He startled up. "No, I can't be lost really. I'm a travelling man. I ran away, that's all. My name is Elijah McCoy. I'm sorry I left your bike on your porch and slept under your ladder."

"No, it's not mine. It's no one's. My name's Candy McGrew," she said and slid over the floorboards to shake his hand, her sneakers singing off key. "What did you run away from?"

"From love. It makes my stomach worse than fried beans and carnival rides, Candy. I'm sure its what kills dogs dead in the middle of the street and what steals balls if they roll down the hill too fast. It steals friends too, steals them right away and leaves you with no one."

"My daddy used to say he loved my mom, but I know why the frying pan bled and the candlestick bent and her eyes were black."

"Let's not bother with love anymore, even if it's just you and me." So they pinky swore and spit in a circle and it was done.

"What is it like to be a traveling man?" Candy asked.

"Well, the grass and hills are for you to roll down and all the wind is yours to breathe, and before you know it, the sky is kissing right back and the wind is breathing through you."

"Sounds beautiful. A place to be. I'll never have one, I bet."  
"You have a place now. With me."

*Mary Ziegler*

# Lost In Zenith

---

Perhaps it *was* a screwy ultimatum darling  
After all , mortification *did* twist the pure screw  
Into the depths of unsatisfactory boyhood  
And conspirators contradicted and implied  
And realizations were only arrived via that paternal train  
It's strong dark engines , purring with the life force of  
    thousands before us  
Saying , “Be happy you ain’t got it all together”.

It's a plunge into the polluted waters of mendacity  
When obsession places the ugliness and filthiness  
Of she who is not happy  
Upon the pedestal of the Virgin Mary

When to touch is to confess  
To the clandestine imperfections of one who calls you a  
    liar  
And a fake  
And an insubstantial facade  
Only because your face  
Gleaming with the luster of unconditional love  
Was used as a mirror  
Reflecting regrettable impurities

Nevertheless , the sweltering heat captured by the  
    asbestos of a classic Brooklyn Edifice , did not derail  
        the train of your

Dreams.

Trying to keep check of reality while the fantasy played  
    on the movie screen of your

Imagination.

Knowing , sensing

Deep within the ravine of your heart

That your emotions were leading you on

And why oh why did I meet you at the zenith of my  
dreams of that non-existent pie in the sky  
On a wintry , disheveled road ; your steel eyes looking  
through me  
Saying , “Boy , I will teach you a lesson you will never  
forget. And though you may hate me for doing this  
to you  
You will love me for excavating you from your hostil-  
ity of naiveness , so you will be allowed to seek  
asylum from that which projects insecurities on  
you.”

And it was then that the compulsiveness was lifted like  
a great veil sewed with the threads of a magician  
secrets  
And the cruel bizarreness , which gnawed like  
threatening undertone on the gentle melody of  
streetlight sonata , dissolved into the air with non  
so much as a goodbye.

So I joyfully ran head first like a screwdriver that drilled  
such things as parametric functions  
And arrived at the next conclusion via that same paternal  
train  
That life can only be analogous to a complicated array  
of mathematical functions  
Intersecting every now and then to either  
Intersect again  
Remain parallel  
Acquire the same domain and range  
Or move farther and farther from the point  
intersection as time continues

And the melodic derivative of such things as amazing  
grace  
Supplanted the song of sadness that originated from t-

peculiar institution  
Referred to as unreciprocal love

Then the holy revelation of freedom elaborated itself  
When it was noticed that the song was not written for  
her.

You wrote it for you.

And of course...

For while you were a mirror in which she perceived all  
that is incorrect and Unjustifiable by the erroneous  
excuse of peer pressure

She was a mirror in which you saw all that is noble.

Peace has finally arrived like the scent of a summer rain  
evaporating off the hot pavement  
And the streetlight sonata plays clear and true.

*Yaqub Prowell*

# “Nick Collins parted the shutters...”

Nick Collins parted the shutters and met the night. He could make out laughter, a couple skating, all moustaches of coco and sidewinding scarves shadowing the ice as they went. In the morning there would be figure eights and names carved in trees. In the morning he would be alone.

Nick used to have friends, to buy boats of french fries and to try to rent the dirtiest sort of movies with. Friends to tell his secrets to over comic books, until they forgot the hour and the french fries and who had won the bet on the football game and only remembered each other. Now they were gone, he was sure of that much. They would be waiting on the alley stretch behind the pawn shop, playing drinking games with garbage cans as equals, trash talking basketball with banana peels and debating girls who had nice asses with cat food cans. Nick wished he could sidestep into the alley and flip a monster-gun barrel out of his trench coat and explode their heads like popcorn. The only problem was, he didn't have a trench coat.

He longed for them as he ran his fingers back over the shutters, bringing the cloak of dark back around his shoulders. It kept them away. They had said that he was a pretty boring guy, and that his ears were far too big and freckly. He had heard through lock grates and inscriptions etched into lunch trays.

Maybe Dad would be home now, chewing away the table cloth with his account papers, to say “How are you doing, son?” his wrinkles bowed away. Or Mom would be nursing her hangover with stale-cellar tomato juice and would make him a cheese sandwich for forgiveness. Someone to keep him warm. Someone.

Nick faded past his light switch and into the hall and began down the stairs, but the dark had forgotten the nail on the landing the angry nail always being put off until time was found again after eggnog at Christmas. It remembered Nick well enough though and it caught him. And then he was falling, falling, like a front line of nutcrackers, falling until he was no more than a cracked nut at the bottom of the stairs.

A cocoon of arms came around him and he knew. Next time, he would reemerge with stained-glass wings and he would be beautiful, ready to take on anyone for a game of horse. Everything would be all right. Next time.

*Mary Ziegler*

# **“The watchers of Lemon County...”**

---

The watchers of Lemon County, Tennessee, wore black socks and veiled eyes as they lined the road, waiting to catch a glimpse of the Collins boy's hearse. Someone at the drug store had said that his mother had worn a pearl-pin from a flea market and that his father had played the horse races still this morning, before the funeral. The lottery ticket window spoke of a limo, large enough to hold an Olympic Swimming team or hold all 3 of your great aunts after a third helping of Thanksgiving yams. So they waited. But soon, stones were kicked across the road and the morning paper was drawn out of coat pockets. A funeral was one thing in Lemon County, but diner eggs would always be sunny-side up and no one called off the morning. You could wait for the Collins boy but time had already gone for breakfast.

Sandy Breizer knew all this. Lemon County was an old woman set in her ways. It only changed its scarf during downy snow falls. No one realized change even then, except for the cars in the diner lot. Winter felt different when you were a Buick.

Sandy waited until the red lacquer set just right on her nails before she drowned lime slices in the water pitcher and headed out for table 2.

“You folks don't look like you're from around here. Picked a fine time to come to Lemon County. You won't see bare leg or liquor bags on the street now. There's a funeral, a limo the size of a tank, I hear. The kind of funeral where black tie and brushed teeth are required.” Table talk had always brought customers' eyes to her apron tips to her apron pocket, but not this time. One menu sat in front of a little boy, no older than his 10 year old sneakers crossed on top of the table. The other lay limp at a man's side, his eyes looking past the duel of the salt shaker and the napkin sentry, looking out the checked curtains. She couldn't see why anyone with eyes that green had to look outside.

“Where you fellows from?” she asked.

“Nowhere,” the boy mumbled, fingers tapping on the menu binding. “Could you make me a waffle with M and M's, maybe

"Or a warm place to sleep?" the man asked, rubbing the boy's hand in his.

"You could stay in my dad's tent. He's dead, has been for quite a while, but a tent is always just the same." She could see it as he spoke, dressed in khaki on top of the trailer fridge, sitting with her father's rifle, waiting for him to come back.

"Thanks," the boy said, "But do you serve chocolate milk this early?" So she shook the man's hand. His name was Aaron McClean, and she felt no ring as she shook. So all day she dreamed, between hash browns and oven grease, of a man with a green eyes.

She took them places she used to go alone, hearing steps other than her own spit through the snow. She took them by where the Parliament of Snowmen held court at the elementary school before they melted away into no more than a carrot, and under the highway bridge, where sparrows and bums got beauty rest, as people went away from her in those cars.

So they came to the trailer park gate, strung with dead Christmas bulbs and mailboxes. The boy, Elijah, had a warm milk to thaw his hand and a song the sparrows taught him. Nick Collins watched the weeds begin to weave over his eyes and his friends tried out chewing tobacco with the garbage cans. And Sandy watched Aaron's eyes.

"So have you found what you're drifting for yet?" she asked. Aaron shook his head in time with the drip in the sink. "How can you know there's anything for you to find?" she wondered at the holes in his jeans.

"I never feel lost when I'm looking, and sometimes my shadow needs to walk ahead. I could never be so sure of looking if there were nothing for me to find." It was awfully easy to believe, as she lay her head against the hole in the couch. She had found him.

Maybe the dawn's glare at the toaster woke her, or it was the opera of junkyard cats on a fence, but she was almost sure that it was his footsteps. "You're leaving," she said without waiting for his answer. "You know I can't go with you. Old people at the counter will need doughnuts and extra napkins. I like Lemon County, neighboring with icicles and dancing with my breath on my way to work.

And what if there really is nothing to find?"

His answer was in his hand as he squeezed hers. "Good luck," she whispered as the screen door winced shut, but she had a feeling that she would be the only one ever to hear. She looked down at her fingers, veined red and peeling away, as she sunk past the dangling moon and onto the floor. There was nothing for her to miss.

*Mary Ziegler*

## Pennsylvania New Year

---

Hoarfrost shimmering like broken champagne bottles  
in the dark restless night  
pulls us forward like stars  
capturing their gravity bound victims.  
Heavy footsteps can crush a sleeping ground,  
fledglings race across silver meadows.

Distance ourselves from the rattlesnake's bite  
A pagan dance in each other's shadows  
with the wind whispering softly in my ear.

*Jasmine Mitchell*

# An Incident on Times Square

He was sitting up on this mountain of rubble in the middle of an urban sprawl out on Times Square at 11:50 P.M. on December 31st , 1999. Cars were beeping their horns , old ladies were fainting , grown men were weeping on their knees , and pimps were offering him discounts on 14-year olds saying , "Hey man , you wanna make another Jesus!"

Well anyway , I somehow managed to penetrate all those Goddamn people and reach that mountain of rubble. I could have climbed the motherfucker but I really didn't want to get all dirty you know. It wouldn't be very presentable. I mean , I *am* goin' to see God.

I walked up to the mountain ; this big ol' hill of debris and trash bags. It was like all the dirt and filth and trash in the original gothic land of neon and concrete that we refer to as New York City had been gathered by some divine garbage man and accumulated to form a throne upon which shall sit the one Creator. I don't know how I managed to get that close to the mountain , you see, because everybody else was kept back from it by the Big Guy's heavenly Secret Service. They were just kinda walking back and forth , patrolling ya know , telling everybody to just stay back. They didn't have any weapons or nothing , but you could tell they didn't need any. When one of them walked by , you could feel and almost hear this sort of crackle , kinda like when you feel the static electricity coming from a T.V. after it's been turned off.

One of them starting walking toward me. I held my ground , but all the while , I felt like I was being pushed back as he came closer , like he was wearing some magnetic outfit that had an opposite po...po...polar...polarity to an outfit that I was wearing. Get my meaning? It was interesting , too , because as he came closer , I felt warmer , like whatever magnetic outfit he was wearing he had just put on me and it was shielding me from the cold , harsh , single digit winter temperature , like a sanctified Columbia windbreaker.

The agent said , "You must be the chosen one." , and I said , "Cool" , and he shuddered and his big black wings trembled , ar-

he took off his dark shades and placed them in the breast pocket of his black Armani jacket , and said , "Man , I can't stand the weather here. I mean , the boss says he gots to come down here , and I'm like , Chief - why? - what's so special about Earth , there's a billion other planets you can go to. But the Big Daddy's all - no , we gots to go to Earth. Now I'm just a bit peeved , 'cuz this is the nicest time of the light year in Eden. Then on top of that , I hear we going to New York. I'm like , shit , of all the places to go , can't we at least land in South America or Puerto Rico or Senegal or something , I mean , the weather's nice and warm in them places! The fuck we got to go to New York for?!"

I said , "That's rough man."

Then he said , "Don't ever call me that again."

So I said , "Oh sorry , didn't mean to offend you." , and that's when I knew that with an attitude like that , this had to be the legendary Agent Gabriel himself."

So , I asked Mr. Gabriel if he could maybe give me a lift to the top of that mountain so I won't have to get all dirty. He smiled and spread his wings , and when he smiled you heard the crackling of thunder and the tremors of the Earth , I'm telling you.

So anyway , Gabriel says , "I'll take you up there if you can correctly answer these three riddles."

I said , "What if I get 'em wrong?"

He said , " Then I hope hanging on to them skanky-ass poles on the subway trains back and forth from work gave you a good strong grip , 'cuz it's a long climb."

I said , "Alrighty then , hit me" , and Gabriel took his huge palm and struck me on the top of my head.

Wincing in pain , I said , "Damn , I didn't mean it that way!". Then Gabriel said , "I know , but that little smack'll help you think better. I mean , it *did* work for the Last Prophet , peace be upon him , when I told his illiterate lazy ass to read. Then look what happened , he became the greatest man to walk this Earth. And all he needed was a little bop upside his head!"

I said , "Okay well..."

He said , "Riddle number one...what is life?"

"Life is God."

"Good ... what is time?"

"Time is God."

"Correctifuckinmundo. What is death?"

"Death is what happens when you're good and ready to meet God ....or the other guy."

Well , Gabriel laughed at that one , and his laugh shook the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty a little loose from their foundations , and parted the Red Sea for the second time. said , "Stop laughing Mr. Gabriel , I gots family in Los Angeles and they must be having a fit by now!" Well Gabriel got the pun not intended and laughed even harder at that one and said , "You cool brother , I'll take you up there to meet the chief."

So he grabbed hold of me under my arms and spread his wings and flew me up to the top of that mountain.

Gabriel said , "Hey Chief , I got someone for ya.", and God turned around , and his eyes were stars , his hair was clouds , and his chin and cheekbones were mountains.

Well , my hair turned white when I saw him , and I suddenly felt 50 years older , just like that dude who had the balls to say , "*Pharoah , you best let ma damn people go , or God is gonna recognize yo ass as a nigga who got to be got for not lettin us go to the mothafuckin' promised land. You think I'm foolin'?!* Then check this one minute it's a rod , next it's a snake. How ya like me now?!", and really didn't know what to say , so I said , "What is the meaning of life?"

Well , I nearly kicked myself for that one. I mean , I'm meeting God and all I can say is some Goddamn cliche.

Well , God looks at me and says , "What?", because he didn't quite hear me right since that big lightning-like ball started descending from its sublime Times Square tower like a spherical monarch overlooking his neon shadowed kingdom and deciding to grace his subjects with his presence. Of course , all the millions of freezing fools out there began counting backwards as the spherical king continued his descent and on the way down bowed to God who is Time who appointed him ruler of the Timeless tradition of New York New Year.

"10"

I repeated my sorry self , “What is the meaning of life?”

“9”

God opened his mouth and I saw all the solar systems in between his teeth. “8”

He bellowed , “That’s the stupidest question I ever heard!”  
“7”

Well , my knees are shaking by now. I mean , I didn’t mean to piss the big guy off.

“6”

But then God puts his hand on my shoulder , and even though I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders as he did that , his touch was as gentle as my mother’s.

“5”

God said , “What do *you* think the meaning of life is?”

“4”

“What do *you* think is it’s purpose?”

“3”

“Why do *you* think I gave you such a thing?”

“2”

I stammered and said , “Uh...uh...to live?”

“1”

Well , I nearly kicked myself again for that one...

“Should old acquaintance be forgot , and never brought to mind...”

...but then God grinned and his eyes shone and he said , ‘Exactly’.

*Yaqub Prowell*

## **"Jake Edwards said we could use his garage..."**

Jake Edwards said we could use his garage. His parents both work, so nobody would be around after school. And his dad's got this hot-rod, 1950's style. Big engine, big wheels that stick out where there aren't any fenders. These big flames painted on. They go up all over the side of the car, these things. Eddy liked the flames. He said they were appropriate. Nobody said anything about that, but I think we all agreed. Those flames just felt right. Like this whole thing had just felt right. I want to make that clear, because I think maybe some people are going to misunderstand. I think maybe some people are going to say it was evil, or some kind of tragedy, but I want to say that this has been nothing but right from the beginning. We've all known that.

It's Alex who can talk about right and wrong. He's the philosopher, the one who sees things. The rest of us, Jake and Eddie King and me, we're not like him. I mean, we're just normal guys. We just wake up and go to school everyday. On the weekends we like to have a good time. We never thought about it too much. Every now and then one of us would go on a bummer, and the rest of us would have to cheer him up. But it wasn't a big deal. None of us were depressed like the people they talk about in health class. I guess things were pretty normal until Alex moved here.

Alex showed us a lot of things. I don't want to say too much because I think maybe I won't say it right. That's one of the things he talked about. This fear, of saying or doing something wrong. He said that was one of the great problems. He said that it's consuming us all. He showed us how everyone in America has got this fear, doing the wrong thing, or saying the wrong thing. Like everything in this country is just a house of cards, and we all have to tiptoe 'cause it could all come down at any moment. When he said that we knew he was on to something, because we had all felt that before. Nobody was sure just when or how, but we knew we had all had that sensation. I didn't say anything, but when Alex was talking I .

membered the times when I lie in bed at night, and the house is almost quiet, except for my parents downstairs, arguing about the taxes or the car or whether they should send me away to a school where my grades will be better. Those times I lie in bed and I stay very still, because I can feel the whole weight of the house, and I know that if I move, if I breathe at the wrong time, it could fall down and bury us all.

Alex told us how he had decided that the world was flawed. He said he could feel it in everything. He said there was something wrong about the world we lived in. Didn't we feel sometimes like all the pieces didn't fit? Yeah, we felt that way. Didn't we feel like there was no order, like there was a great emptiness in everything? We nodded our heads. We might not all have been sure of what he was saying, not then. But the time would come when we would all see.

This is all in early October. By then, Alex had been around for a few months and had started hanging around with Jake Edwards and Eddy King and me. The three of us go way back, back to when we were in elementary and would spend every Thursday night together because our parents all played in the same poker game and it was cheaper to get just one sitter. The game dissolved eventually, and we got too old to need sitters anyhow, but we still hung around together most of the time. We don't talk about it, about our friendship I mean, but those Thursday nights spent in one of our empty houses, when together we would try to convince the sitter to let us stay up for another re-run of *The Dukes of Hazard*, formed something bigger than any one of us.

Alex came at the beginning of the summer after our junior year in high school. The first time I met him I was sitting out in front of my house, it being my turn to watch over our annual summer yard sale. The day was cooler than expected, and cloudy, and nobody was stopping for the 50¢ lemonade we had set out. That's the best way to get people to come to a yard sale. Pick a hot day and make up some lemonade, and you can't sell it fast enough. They come for the lemonade and stay to buy some piece of junk you're trying to get rid of, works every time. But not that day. I was about ready to cover up the stuff and head in when I see this kid walking up. He was kind of tall, thin, with a slow lanky walk. I remember

the slowness of his walk because of the way it went against his eyes. Alex's got these eyes that never stop moving. He takes it all in. He came up and looked around some, then he looked over at me. I could see he was shy, the way he would look up at me and then off somewhere else, so I gave a little nod, to be friendly. He came over "You got anything here I need?", he asked.

"Dunno," I said, "We've only got what's here. Stuff we're trying to get rid of."

"Mm," he nodded. "Well, you can't ever buy anything you really need."

This was the first conversation I ever had with Alex. At the time I thought little of it, just that he was an odd guy. Looking back I can see that it was more than that. It was fate, I think. There's destiny in everything, only you can't see until later. Time is funny that way.

I could see that Alex was shy and self-contained, but there was something going on in that head of his. I liked him. I introduced him to the other guys, and they seemed to like him too, or at least they didn't mind his being around. He came on a couple of fishing trips, and to the movies, and he seemed to fit in well with the three of us. We got to know him well in those summer months and when school came around he was around more and more.

It's funny about Alex. I think there's something compelling about being around him. I think it's maybe because he has this vision. You see it in his eyes, the way he looks at things and the way he talks. He was talking more and more about the things he saw, at least when he was around us. Around other people he's a quiet guy, but around us he was opening up, talking all the time. By the end of October and into November he was talking a lot about the leaves. Right then the leaves are real orange and red, sometimes yellow, these bright colors everywhere. Alex kept talking about how it was beautiful, one of the few really beautiful things, because these leaves, in life, they're never really beautiful, just green, plain. But when they die, they become bright, full of color. Each finds its own perfection, is what Alex said. After, they fall back into dirt, or real this brown mush, and they fade away. But Alex said that just the one moment of perfection, that brief period before death, justified

the leaf's life. It made it whole. Eddy said he thought it was sad, but Alex said no, because the leaf became everything it could be, and so it was okay for it to die. Jake said, wasn't it like when a soldier takes a bullet in a battle and he's saving his best friend and so it's okay? Alex said yes, it's the same, both deaths give meaning to the life.

I think by this point Jake was beginning to really understand what Alex was about. Eddy and me weren't far behind, really. Some notions were forming in my mind and I think in Eddy's too. You could see it in his eyes. They were almost empty but there was a fire growing in there. All of us were like that. We would walk around and see through things, like the world had stopped being real for us. Other times it would be like everything was too real. There was a brilliance in the air and the edges of things were so sharp it brought tears to my eyes. We could see every atom, feel each moment. That was just the vision, getting closer and filling everything.

Of course, this was later on. At first it was more subtle, little things Alex would say. One day we found a dead sparrow and he talked about it for most of the afternoon. Caterpillars fascinated him, and he we go on at length about their metamorphosis. They spend their lives as little worms, nothing to look at, but then they become butterflies. It's the change, like with the leaves, that makes it okay for them to spend so much time being ugly. It's their justification. Alex always became excited about justification. Often he would be detached, but when something drew his attention, when those eyes lit on something, it was everything. He had a passion that could show itself in an instant.

One day he showed us this trick somebody had told him about. I guess this was near the end of September. You squat down and breathe hard and fast, and then you stand up all at once and somebody has to push you hard in the stomach. If you do it right you lose consciousness for a second. You blackout, it's like you just lips away for a second. When you come out everything reels. Alex got us all doing it. We got to like it, to like the sensation of disappearing. Like sliding into water, submerging, but without fear. There's kind of perfect tranquillity in that. Alex called it the "point of release", when the world and its flaws slip off. Of course in the trick

the world always comes back, more or less how you remembered it. You come gasping into the light. Back then, we were all still glad of that light. We wanted that light, I think as proof that things were still real. We wanted to know that we still existed.

Alex was slowly building his vision around us. Maybe it was building itself around him too, or maybe it came from inside. Wherever it was from, it was becoming real for us, more real every day. As winter came on and Alex's leaves dropped away and disappeared beneath the snow he began to speak more and more openly. Phrase began to repeat themselves, things like "flawed existence" or the "point of release" that leads to the "transcendent moment of perfection". That was the key, the final moment. It was the "redeeming factor" which would justify existence. The final escape contains the final perfection, the final redemption.

I can repeat these things that Alex said, but I know that they cannot explain the vision which Alex showed us. It runs deeper than words. Alex spent months opening our eyes bit by bit, because had he shown us all at once we couldn't have understood. Our fears would have stopped us. This fear that we all have, the fears Alex talked about, they make the vision that we have had seem like a evil thing. I know that whoever reads this will have those fears, and I want to say that if you can let go of them you can see what beautiful thing the vision really is. Give yourself over to it, and you will see that it is only good and right. Once we were committed, we all understood that.

It's winter now, and the world is closing up around us. We are all ready. It has been easier than I thought it would be. Sometimes the old fears bubble up, but I know them for what they are now and I can let them pass. The others are at the same level of acceptance. We are unified in our readiness for what we will do.

Deciding how was easy. It was Eddy King who found the news story about those other kids who had done it. They sealed themselves in a garage and ran their car engine until the gases built up enough. It put them to sleep first, then it quietly killed them. When Alex saw that he knew he was right, had been right all along. It was perfect. We understood that in another town another set of kids had had the same vision as we had. Everything clicked. We

Jake said we should use his garage. That roadster is perfect. It's fate, the same fate that has guided us all through this thing. Soon now we will go out to that fate, seated in the chariot that fate has provided. Everyone agreed that Alex should be the one to sit in the driver's seat. Jake, who has always understood best, will sit next to him, and Eddy and I will sit in the back.

I've shown this story to the other guys. They all like it. We want to leave something for the world, something to try and explain. We want to dispel some of the horror we know people are going to feel. That horror is unavoidable. It's a creation of the fears everyone has, of the conditions of Alex's "flawed existence". But there should be no horror. There should be no fear, for we all understand what it is we do. We have all seen the vision, and the vision is justification in itself. Do not mourn us. We have passed into our own perfection. I hope the world understands the beauty which we have found and into which we enter. For us it is the only understanding there can ever be again. My final hope is that our vision will not die with us, but will reach out to touch another life. A part of me knows that it will.

*Max Young*

# Harvest Cycle

Everytime I wake up, he hangs himself again. Though he was dead long before I slept in his room or between his sheets, the horse thief follows me everywhere I wake, his body sagging, with every hanging, deeper and deeper between mountains. Hal rolls over and back under the pillow, pulling me fifteen years back into the now.

The home-call came to me in Margaret's name. The woman said, her voice squat, duckish, that Margaret was getting married and my mother was dying. *You haven't been back in fifteen years hightime you came.*

Halfway into the morning, I slam a suitcase on the bed and tell him I am going home. He nods. Outside traffic rushes like wind across water at riptide, streets swirling with screeching tire sounds, hard on your ears like sparrowhawk squawk.

The city, spit-shined smooth, sparks easy against the summers back home. City buildings shrunk wide-ways and stretch tall-ways, stack together so slim that light can barely fall through them, or sound. Meanwhile, Wayside Green rolls and runs, a tumbler turning cartwheels - making a mountain a minute or a field stretch of corn-leaved sea.

I was born between mountains, coming out of my mother's womb between dreams, before the snow and after the turning of the leaves. Weaved of a mountain stream and thatched from the smoke in the mountain breeze - my hands, the now, the words dissolve. I ride the railroad, returning to the dust. The farther south I come, the farther mountainward, my hair, bleached by sun, grows into river weeds and wheat, caught up in cattails.

Craven Goodspeed meets me at the station. He is still the color of wet sand. Throwing my bag over his shoulder, he says nothing. After old man Reamy hung himself, some twenty years backwards from the now, Craven took his shanty down by the shore, nobody saying anything about stealing a haunt's house. Craven didn't say anything for years after that, living off of smallmouth e

could spear upstream and buckets of lard stored in the old man's basement.

Craven dumps my bag in the dust at Margaret's house; she walks outside, feet keeping mountain time. She puts her hand on my shoulder and says, *hey*, and some long sentences about years and seeing me. She smiles her sisterly smile, underneath it all that talk you save for later, when Craven for gods sake goes home. Then she touches him on the shoulder and says, *Craven and I are getting married in August; we hope you'll stay for the wedding*. You could smell the sand in her breath, hear the white winds in her voice.

Riverwater for blood and wheat for hair, I exhale smoke, speak black exhaust. The river rushes in my voice. I dream of things the river's seen: men from the mines, dawn shift, a soot darker than cinder. The river raised a dead eye to Somerset Nead taking Ricky Rowe's woman down by the wharf.

After the cement from the city began to wade into my speech with the leveled flatness of mapped-out roads, I began to forget the weight of the wind on riverside grasses. The river eclipsed by the current, I no longer dreamed in brown.

Woolen light of morning come, a sky of purple grain: I wake unto the outside. Margaret, sitting on the rocker in the corner of he bedroom, tells me without turning that she hoped all that city-living had taught a no-good whore like myself some lessons. I ay if I'm a no-good whore, what does that make her and at least I wouldn't marry a dumb-for-no-reason dusty-faced... She says was t Theo.

All our hair is wheat; all the clouds here, cotton. Bread before supper, supper before bed, bed before rest, rest before daylight, and daylight before the breaking of the bread.

In my mother's house, I sit beside her while she sleeps. She vakes; her eyes flame, a splitting ignition, and then darken, as if huttered behind black glasses. *I gave you to know that if you ever ... but here you are. Ruth.*

I swallow my breath. My spine thickens; I know each bone

by shape.

*For His sake I forgive you now, Ruth. For His sake... I am going to my Redeemer. Going to my Light. For me, there is redempmtion.*

I want to say that her words bound me, that I left her bedside white.

Margaret, two days later on the back porch with me, smoking up my slim cigarettes I bought special (but this unknown to her), says *remember when they took Mom to jail. Remember when we were living all alone with Number-Two, the Rodeo Roadkill King* Here's to us, I say, years ago, with Junior Johnson, the Rodeo Roadkil King of Mustang, Montana. I extinguish the cigarette on the upside of my thigh.

Junior Johnson was boomerang-bent in two and bald when he married mom, she half his age and twice his size in the then, and we moved into his house, a ranch welded flat to the back mudside of Duck Hollow. We, Margaret and me, suspected the slap-dash marriage had something to do with his son Theo. Theo, weaned from bark, slid at birth into a bucket, flowing down a tin tube with the syrup from the trunk. Theo flatboatman, storekeeper, postmaster, surveyor, and weekend cabinetmaker. Theo, with one hand signing scam deals with the mine-owning men, the other chuckin' potatoes up exhaust pipes of Somerset Nead's four Fords. The motherfucker, made us take the room, more window than wall where his grandfather the horse thief had hanged himself.

The Mountain Wilderness of Wyoming is where Number-Two, the old kicker, wanted to go when he died, going down humping, with a lasso in his mouth. Margaret and I tried spit on him from our window when he crawled, coughing block into the barn where it was cool. After that, with Mom in jail, the old kicker stayed downstairs in the house. He wouldn't even come up to use the bathroom, peeing in tea cups or in the pantry sink.

River comes out in my hair and reflects from my eyes and spreads across my skin in the sun. I went to give blood; they dr

brown river water, rife with minnows and three-eyed catfish. Gur-gling, rushing against the houses for so many years, it wore its way n, through floorboards and beneath my skin, further into the deepest chambers of the flesh.

For all her stories, Mom was a poor shot, turned to horseshit with a double in her hands, couldn't even pull the treble out of caught trout. When not jailbound or bedridden with a birth or abortion, she worked as a waitress, remarkable in three counties for her old hands, hands like those of an old woman, even when she was young. Tender-handed with us when she was watched, old hands unning through young wheat, her hands dissolved when watching yes rolled away. They never turned back-slap hard, just drifted, drifted. Margaret heard from Theo that those old hands were in jail or at least a year. Margaret said *good, now we don't have to take no more baths.*

Our only other neighbor in Duck Hollow wondered about ur nutrition, how was we doing with our mom gone. Margaret's yes got big and her bottom lip slipped down like she was just about tell about Junior Johnson's raw fish left in the sink with the scales n, the kitchen sink, which we hoped he didn't shit in. I kicked her ard under the table and said *yeah, nutrition's good*. Our brother Theo takes good care of us. I told Margaret later, *That's what she oped to hear. She hoped to hear of Theo*. We called her One-Eyed Villy from then on, knowing from Junior that her name was Vilma-Willy, Wilma-Willy Monahan, unmarried and no longer nwilling to jeopardize her immortal soul: yellow-lace panties los-ing their elastic up top.

Fish, buried and half-buried, struck down daily conversa-on and floated through the hallways: flat-faced Angel fish, the urnt-blue beta fish and the Monogahela special: three-eyed cat-sh. They breathed from our breaths and ate from our words, hid a corners and tormented Theo's cats. Margaret wanted to know in one, *can fish fly?*

Theo came home one night with a girl so round-faced with niles you knew she must be from out of town. She drove a red slip f a car, shining, with slit-eyed windows. Margaret was sitting up ith her *Manual of Catholic Prayer* alternately quoting Sirach and

praying for me... *Let not the lustful cravings of the flesh master you.*  
*Surrender not to shameless desires.* Crawling on my belly to her bed, holding her ear to my lips, I continued the next chapter, *There are words which merit death. May they never be heard among Jacob's heirs.* I started whispering wisdom-phrases writ-scrawled on bathroom stalls, inserting Margaret and Junior Johnson and horses until I felt tears through her flattened lashes, until they wet the bottom of my palm pressing her head to the bedboard.

I slipped down the attic stairs. I balked at his bedroom door, listening for the colored speech flashing across the keyhole.

Nothing.

The dead fish frothed at the lips, saying *in the house of man in the house of man.* I followed the origin of their sounds: his word rough-edged and homespun, bred on buttermilk, then he honeysong: the shovel-nosed woman must have had a magpie in her chest. From the bathroom, a leap-to, up-running scream shattered: smoke on the water. I banged to the floorboards, through the open door seeing her head growing out of Theo's back below his ear.

When they came out, I was waiting, eyes like tobacco leather. Theo hit the heel of his palm to his forehead. I said *I'm sick.* In his bedroom he handed me a bottle and sent me upstairs. The first si was as clean and clear as the brassy, burnt-through first taste of vinegar.

I drank til brown water came out my eyes, my hair and my ears. Margaret peeled the bottle from me and poured it in the toilet. The next afternoon, I looked at my butchered new hair, Margaret explaining I cut it over the toilet to fill the water with weeds and the feathers of the canvasback and mallard, all kinds of wildfowl and waterfowl, the gadwall and the blond tails of salmon. She said I was sending rain back to the prairies.

One month later, One-eyed Willy moved us in with him. One-Eyed Willy was born between cosmos like Molly the mad mule who ran herself into the river. She bopped Margaret for bringi

her a bouquet of flowers on account of them being "cut from the hand of the living". She kept telling us to make miracles of ourselves.

If you asked her garden jibberish, she was sharp as the tin edge of a can-opened lid. She sprouted garden-speak, winking with her marine-green caked-over eye, flaring her long nose and lifting her tamoshanter. The Christmas after we moved back in with Mom and Junior Johnson, she sent us two African Violet leaves with their stems dipped in rooting powder. Margaret's grew; mine bent back into the soil by spring. When Mom married Number-Three, One-Eyed Willy sent a broken-off twig from a pussy willow tree, telling Margaret to put it in the ground when it snowed. It grew supernatural quick like comic-strip kids, fuzzball-fur blossoms drizzling droplets until you could pet its top outside the second-floor window.

On account of being born between cosmos, One-Eyed Willy had a good memory for town-tales and told them - quick and easy: he'd fortell your own death if she knew it, or had heard about it, or even if she'd heard about someone else's dying and thought it was ou even if it wasn't anyway. Either way, you'd be on your knees by undown, or picking out tombstones in the afternoon. Quick and asy, 1,2,3.

She told us about Somerset Nead taking Ricky Rowe's woman down by the wharf.

*When Ricky Rowe found out, Ricky Rowe said he couldn't have been more surprised if someone told him he was pregnant. He kicked his woman's front up like the belted-out burp of a hiccup, forgetting that rust-repair and fiberglass-sheet-metal-fillings don't fix flesh like a ruck. When she took sick and miscarried their baby, he bought a de-by-side double with the too-quick triggers slipping back and went to the river to do himself some penance. Taking that twelve-gaged splintered fore-end, with the twenty-nine-inch barrel of straight stock, pillar-trimmed for a fish-kicking pintail, he put it on his chin and shot, tipping back on accident so the bullet flung up and hit a duck, red meat flaming in straight-stroked fins of blood. After that, scared to the rivers, he sold it to Honey-Boy Rockwell, it being six pounds light and good for an up-choke, back-choke drake-downing. Ricky took his woman*

*and skipped town, leaving Somerset Nead a misspelled death threat.*

Now if One-Eyed Willy hadn't had cosmo dust in her good eye and a blindness in the other, she would've left it at that, Margaret crying over her *Manual of Catholic Prayer* and me, chest-chilled to kick Margaret's front up. Next thing you know One-Eyed Willy was saying how Ricky Rowe's woman come back, fresh as watermelon left deep in a spring house well, and shacked up with Honey-Boy Rockwell. She said Ricky Rowe's woman tricked Honey-Boy Rockwell so she could make a decent woman of herself. Late, he arrived at the church at half-past-two and wed her with a ring carved out of a peach pit. Wilma-Willy says she remembers the wedding real well: Ricky Rowe's woman smiling like she was growing into what she always wanted to be, birds blooming across the sky, Wilma-Willy straining and shining with song, psalm word tumbling out from her toenail to her tummy to her tongue to the altar.

Next thing you know Ricky Rowe turns up dead, floating face-down in the wetlands, the three-inch high water on the river-front lowlands. Next morning, the sheriff took Ricky Rowe woman and Somerset Nead to the jailhouse until they, you know - confessed! No one did, and people thought it was a suicide, until Doc Holler said how could he shoot himself twice through the heart. Two months later, when Ricky Rowe's woman came home to Honey-Boy from the calaboose, they found themselves flinging firesticks at each other, with a dried up lust too heavy to let sit.

## S O

*Honey-Boy took a travelling job, riding around the mountains selling shine out of the back of his truck.*

Christmas carolers came up the porch. Margaret shot out of her chair, eyes red-rimmed and jiggling with tears, and dimmed all the lights. *Why you dimmin the damn lights, Margaret, I said?* She was always dimmin the damn lights and turnin down the damn radio. Margaret couldn't ever stay in a room of bright lights and loudmouthed music, she being born in a dream, dream-silent,

deep into the night there was no moon. One-Eyed Willy crept to the cupboard for cookies and to her purse for pennies. She hollered to the carolers to come on in. They came on in. *You sing good*, she said, *but I'm clean out of cookies and money. So you go out back and carry off - W H A T e v e r.* They wandered out to the back porch which they found full of skipping ropes, refrigerators, wires and tires, doorless dishwashers, and televisions which flickered and sputtered at will. They carried off One-Eyed Willy's kept-from-childhood collection of one-eyed, chipped-lipped china dolls.

Come November in a rickety, valley-set shed, Ricky Rowe's woman bore her first-born, a daughter.

She decided to name the baby Ruth.

Margaret burst into tears. *Ruth! Ruth! Get it, Ruth? Ruth,* she screamed earsplitting to me, *who do you think was husband Number One?*

I pressed the heel of my palm into my forehead, Margaret-sounds and Wilma-words winding up my spine and scattering.

One-Eyed Willy, wickerwork-stiff, stammered story bits through her black teeth. *Spending all the money she never had on that baby*, One-Eyed Willy said. Margaret said the story did for the econd, *would anyone like some canned spinach?*

One-Eyed Willy up and told us to git after the spinach, so Margaret and I split, legs quick-ripping to the woodlands.

The further south from the house we went, the more we onjured. We'd begin with lists of what One-Eyed Willy is. Margaret said Wilma-Willy Monahan has a mouth bigger than a largemouth bass. *Wilma-Willy is a one-eyed, flyway duck gut.* I said, *Wilma-Willy Monahan is a gun chambered for bullets no longer manufactured.* By the time we busted out of the yard, leaving all the rip-ropes and tulips and turnips behind, we'd flung our Wilma-Willy-words dustward.

Years closer to the now, sometime after number-four and eight before I left Wayside Green, sixteen and beginning to show, Margaret said she wondered if all them Wilma-Willy stories had something to do with how I turned out, if words spoken came true or the speaking. She said maybe it was like how ghost stories make

themselves true, ghosts growing from gust-blown window shears.

Outside of Duck Hollow and tucked back into Wayside's back lands, Margaret always made me visit all the people she was praying for. First she had us visit Jameson, the one named after the whiskey, the one that wouldn't grow.

Jameson's cabin stuck out of the side of a mountain. As soon as he saw us he smiled, him nice enough to smile at strangers us being strangers every single day we came. It was hard to tell where dirt ended and he began, his eyes sweeping clean from Margaret's forehead to her nose and back, brown eyes flat and downturned, like the flap of a burlap sack. First thing on Margaret's Prayer Run was to say *May God be with you*. His cabin was always a fog, the rooms, cotton-edged. Crates lost their crisp corners, walls forgot their darkest lines. Margaret's blown-out bones in her cheeks softened, the concrete sides steamed away. We'd pet the cat that dragged in bluebirds and field mice, making his house a box of dead animals. We'd squish the crickets that had blue blood and a sting when they died. Afterwards, usually in the middle of super-great cricket squashing, Margaret would spill out her spells. *May the peace of the Lord be with this house*, she'd say, bending down to touch his head.

Project Number Two on Margaret's Prayer Route was a visit with Hickman Tuesday in the Blue Caboose, a shack near the racetrack side-stables which he owned. Hickman Tuesday, who later founded a riverboat gambling ring with Theo, sort of tolerated Margaret while she talked with his wife. I'd glean gambling tricks when he schooled me at Gin Rummy and Poker. *Troubled*, he'd tease, *I is shit troubled in this game*, me knowing he was ready to swoop in with a win. Margaret's chin flew up: *Troubled? Try Pray*. And Mrs. Tuesday would look over her shoulder at Hickman with a down-turned smile.

My spin on Hickman's wins was this: he won because he figured he was going to win and fixated on his funny face, this making it easy for him to cheat them stupid while they looked hopeless-like at his big ears, nose and hands. Biggest of all was his eyes, like bright-backed beetles, walnut-sized, out-tripping eyes, un-whorled from his lids like the petals wide-peeled off a dy-

rose. Eyes so big they made you wonder if he could see the farther for them. Even his tongue seemed too big for his mouth. Mrs. Tuesday, oppositely, was a sprig of sparrow feet. She always wore black and purple eyeshadow; when her eyes closed, they looked like two moons of dusk. Margaret usually stayed until Hickman beat me three times at Gin Rummy or two times at Gin Rummy and once at Poker, or three times at Poker or two times at Poker and once at Gin Rummy. Then he stepped out of his chair and shooed us away, him saying that betting-barns were no place for small girls, him saying *Ya'all will build better houses.*

The last stop on the soul-raising railroad was a spin on Tommy Scott's tractor. Tommy, whose mother sat with Margaret at Mass, called us the whiptide finish on his midnight rides across his fields, him mowing and us mooing at the cows across the pasture. Margaret, stormy-eyed, sang church hymns, stood up on the seat, with one hand on Tommy's shoulder and the other on mine. Tommy promised he'd say some prayers, just as soon as he hailed his half-a-moon harvest, but him not really meaning to, unless praying meant humming hymns on the toilet.

Come dinner, back at Wilma-Willy's, Margaret took meat out of the cupboard above the earthenware plates where Willy left it to thaw. At nights I'd sleep upside-down and she'd sleep right-side-up, half-asleep, arranged split-style for fit like sardines. Margaret says I had to sleep upside down because I was born between mountains, used to a squeeze, a bit east of Moon County, east if you follow a river twisting westward, then stuttering eastward across the flip-side of sky.

Long after we forgot the figuring of the days, tucked into Wilma-Willy's hothouse of things which grew, we heard a knock at the door. *Maybe it's Theo*, Margaret said, me thinking with our luck was probably Junior Johnson coming at us with peed-in tea cups.

Mom kicked open the door, not waiting for Wilma-Willy to walk to lift the latch. *Good God*, Wilma-Willy said. *Come on*, Mom aid, right through her, grabbing us. *You watch them kids!* Wilma-Willy said. *You grab them like you was grabbing a cat or a dog or a chicken*. *Like you were thinking*, Oh well, here's a cat or a dog or

*a pig or a chicken. Anybody want it?* Twisting my head through Mom's arm, I stuck my tongue out: *Cluck, Cluck, Cluck...*

At three o'clock in the morning, pots slamming and doors banging woke us. Every day at three o'clock in the morning from then on we'd hear running, screaming, like someone'd let bulls into the liquor cabinets.

The wedding was set for the day after the Nebraska Red-Leaf festival, but Somerset Nead and Jimmy Rowe, the younger, advised her to wait for winter. Bullets live free on full moons.

Mom had only waited until a month after Junior died to start spending time with soon-to-be Number Three.

Winter time, butter stayed hard in the dish. Margaret and I skipped the wedding.

Summertime, Mom and Number Three asked us did we want to go up West Virginia with them. We said no; Mom said no problem. They left before the May wet became the June sweat butter turned buttermilk in the dish.

June sweat sent us, all but buck-naked, wading down Mudd Creek to catch minnows with paper cups. Margaret liked to pet them then let them go. I liked to leave them out on mid-creek rock where lizards who crawled belly-up to sun themselves would eat them, if the minnows didn't get sucked into the sun first. Mudd Creek ran into a bigger creek called Ten Mile Creek, which was far as Margaret followed it. That summer I resigned from my post on the Prayer Railroad.

I came back to the Monongahela for the foot-long salamanders which slithered along my feet and up my legs. I came back to the river for the three-eyed catfish no one caught for eating and, when left on the roads to wither, churned up chemicals, coal dust and broken beer bottles. I came back because it had an undertow which swallowed grown men alive.

One of the last days before I exchanged slash pine for shed and minnows for mirrors, Margaret took to coming with me again. We wandered thick into a cornfield until we got lost, me kicking over some bushels of grain in a clearing for dwarf wheat. *Look*, Margaret said, *beyond the thicket*, and she slipped towards the tips

all stalks, wandering wild in the wheat. The tall stalks of grain, high gold like wheat, with wheat-like kernels, but too tall to be grown around these parts, parted curtain-like. She sat on the roof of a rusted car.

She slipped in the drivers' side, hunched over the wheel. *This car is going to take me to New York*, Margaret said. Margaret, I aid, getting in, *we sin when we behave superstitiously*. Margaret climbed out the other side, saying how bright the sun is, running iptide back to the ranch, past One-Eyed Willy's wired, tired back porch.

Seasons a slip of time, something to change clothes for...

Heads down, we walked to the shed, he occasionally glancing back frowning as I followed too slowly, our breaths rising steam through the dawn. The second-floor of the shed, for tools and supplies, a room of peeling-paint and sawdust, cobwebs and clustered leaves, couldn't contain heat. He shut the door, turned to face me. I focused on the fields outside, his hand swallowing my stomach. The streets below spreaded darker than the bottom of the sea; the river drank them down.

Footsteps pounding up the planks to the second-floor of the shed, Theo in the doorway, Theo throwing him screaming through the window to the soil.

Theo stopped speaking to me until the next summer, when he developed a system of sucking on a piece of grass, a cock-quail cream to send me shedding shoes downstairs and out the front door. Margaret included me as case number four of her fruitless route. *Troubled? Try Prayer...*

I followed, had, have, am following Theo through the corn and dwarf wheat, to the rusted body of a car with a trunkful of heat, with wheat coming up between the carseats, engine threaded through the vents with waist-high reeds, seaweed and birchbark, carried from the woodlands. I fell, had, have, am falling forward into where I always wanted to be, until we, wheat and river and peness, rot to the bruised plum of the twilight sky.

I wake at three in the morning, feel my mother in the room.  
I wake at three, wear my mother's eyes about my shoulders. Her  
picture on the wall stretches the fibers in my chest suddenly for-  
ward, shrinks my lungs. My mother blows the soft hairs on my  
arms, sees my eyes on her picture, knows me naked in bed, sees  
beyond covers, beyond skin, beyond the lie of the river and the  
wheat.

Here is her funeral at the town church: Somerset Nead and  
Jimmy Rowe, the younger, and four men I don't know as pallbear-  
ers.

Here is Margaret marrying Craven Goodspeed, she saying  
*do* with sand in her teeth, him speaking for the first time after Old  
Man Reamy hung himself, everyone else struck dumb.

Here is Muddy Creek which runs into Ten Mile Creek which  
floods into the Mongahela which swallows grown men alive.

Here is One-Eyed Willy's porch, sagging and swarmed by  
vagrant riverboat gamblers, her grave beneath the pussy willow.

Here is the barn and the ranch where Junior Johnson wen  
down humping, a lasso in his mouth, now the town doctor's coun-  
try house.

Here is a cornfield which turns into dwarf wheat which lead  
to a rusted car body, holes in the hood rusted through, strange grain  
sticking high like the wheat through the cracks in the backseat.

Bone outlasts wood, teeth outlasts rusted steel, Theo's teet  
and my teeth outlasting all these words turned true for the speak-  
ing.

Here is me with my hand on the handle. The hills rise up  
browning all the bodies here, between mountains.

*Kate Zangrilli*

# “Dorothea Lange’s Plantation Overseer...”

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Dorothea Lange’s ‘Plantation Overseer Mississippi Delta near Clarksdale, Mississippi, July 1936’

‘Earlier, I’d gotten at them through the ways they’d been torn loose, but now (in the South) I had to get at them through the ways they were bound up...’

It is July with the sun coming down in balloons of heat and bodies of moisture lift off the split earth, vanish in the air. Six men make a break on the chewed steps of the general store. Their raw-dged hats darken their faces with disks of shadows. Their sleeves are rolled up to their elbows and the sweat from their chests blooms in their shirts in dark diamonds.

The overseer cracks his mouth open and lifts his heavy chin to the sun. His leg rests on the metal bumper of his car. The colored license plate emerges from under his thigh. His hand grips his leg as his great stomach stretches across space. He assumes the hollow pose of some colossus in his sporting pin-striped pants and strapped suspenders. He is restless, but he has nothing to do. As an overseer, all he can do is watch damp bodies stained by the sun stand against the earth, cultivating nothing but mud.

“We’ve got the finest mud, boys. The finest mud around these parts,” he almost says.

The boys rest quietly behind him. Five black faces watching the weather play day-venturing vampire. Their pants are rolled and their boots are light with dust. Three sit, two stand. One sucks the narrow eye of a smoking pipe despite the heat. His legs are open and his arms fold across his knees. Another rests his fingers in his lips, another’s palms relaxing together in the bed of his lap.

They have no work. Bricks are stacked in a weed-molested pile underneath the exposed porch of the general store, but there is nothing to build. Plants are screaming to be bom, but there is no

water- just expensive glass bottles of Coca-Cola standing like frosted ballerinas in the general store's icebox.

"But who can feed a plantation with Coca-Cola?"

They are bound here by their families' steaming mouths that reach in moving caverns for money and for food. Roads and transportation blink off into curving contours of the earth, but there is no destination better than this one. Every other town across the country bears the same parched pockets. Six men press their hands against the worn cloth of their ironed trousers. It is better to maintain what one already has than to move away, to California or to the West; give it all up in precarious hopes of recreating a new life there

"Just waiting for night to come and slip me into a realm where I go places, work, rest, and touch water."

*Caitlin Berrigan*



*Carl Dietz*



*Lisa Lake*

# Permutations

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Describe it as the eye behind the eye. Call it a muscle, a tendon, but hard as a turkey's hairpin neck bone. Name it a disk, flat, set back from the bulge of iris, for bending light, a screw behind the ear, for turning sound, a stem up the nose for channeling smell. Say it until its name no longer matters.

Your hearing is the first to go. After you wake to fluttering drops dripping no sound, your wanting wakes the sound of water dripping down the sink. But the faucet in the sink leaks no water; rain hasn't come in weeks. Dripping itches inside your ear to keep the ticking close. Second to go is the light, washing away in color wheels. Your eyes go marine, garden green, fingernails black from fingers full of sight. Your tongue is the third to go; mouth dries up; taste and lip split together.

If he trusted his voice or the eye behind his eye, now flooding, he might have said out loud: Diesel, Diesel, Motorcycle People, Liam Lake. Marisa on the porch, peeps around the drainpipe as if to take stock of things she'd planted there; Liam Lake, arms akimbo, wings on the screen door as if to sideways stretch himself door-tall.

Liam Lake knows the knots in his father's eyes, steaming lenses of ropeburn-flame. He knows, too, the tough to the touch, snakeskin-smooth spread of skin, the blonde arm hairs a blinding surprise beneath, a pomegranate illusion, beaded inside.

Diesel's spit on the sidewalk sizzles like cinder in the sun, his face flattened slack, his eyes like too-strong lights your eyes see though closed.

Howard lips a thin smile and slams the door.

Diesel explained to Liam that the girl behind the garage was coffee-raw and thin as tea, taut around the thigh, someone to sling across your shoulder and carry through frost and fire, a smiling something in the making. By Diesel's lips, night fell heavier than sleep.

"What did you do when Dad came out? And hammered the for-sale sign? Bet you lost it there, Champ."

"I told her he was a musician. That musicians are sad all the time." Diesel leans back, like his dad relaxed at the suppertable "That girl was too wild for color TV."

Marisa weeds peonies, her suitcases stacked on the luggage racks, tied in tight by the ropes they used this time last month Liam looks east, trying to guess the name of the new state, the town how many beatings the boys will give him in school for a break-in Diesel leans against the bird-ledge near the tar path to the back waiting for his father to come, dragging the last of everything.

"I'm not leaving this time," Diesel says at the first stroke o Howard's shadow. "You go. Mom got this peony garden, Liam Lake likes it here..."

"Diesel..." Marisa says.

"Nashville, Macon, Kennebunkport. Houston, back t Kennebunkport. Philly, Lawrenceville, Syracuse. Salem MA. Bos ton, Bangor, Buffalo. Salem NH. Chicago, Charleston, Port Larvi What do you think you are, a Greyhound bus?"

Marisa drives so slowly that Liam Lake catches geometr flashes of sunlight across stop signs, the smell of shucked corn.

Howard sits on his hands to keep them still, says, tong robust after a month of dried quiet, a canning, that Port Larvis w a cross between an insane asylum and a voodoo junkyard, spel bound by brimstone and knee-buckled before amber lamps an gas-station soothsayers.

Howard looks with his eye behind his eye at the restauran *The Famous Painter*. From the side of the restaurant the light bend a favorable forward direction, bat-winged.

Diesel and Liam Lake like the look of the waitress's legs she hands them a menu. Diesel nudges Liam Lake as she bends hear what Howard asks, for water, at her arched over him, all sming face and sexy legs.

Howard flings the menu down and leaves.

Diesel swears everyone watches them as they leave the r taurant. He swears the waitress with the sexy legs stops servi other patrons to stare.

By Howard's mouth, The Famous Painter had his decim points in all the wrong places. According to Howard's lips, Mar

drives too slow; pass the damn keys, please. The light off that waitress skyrocketed, a real loony on-line all-the-time, too. Did you see her? That weird look on her face?

Though the phone rings in the flat above and below and beside him, Howard's new phone doesn't ring. He ripped it out of the jack last week because the phone ringing from people wanting to order pizzaaa! from Papa John's or get their hair done at the Pink Poodle Hair Salon rung like to make his ears fall off. Liam Lake bringing home a cat who sits at the bottom of the bathtub, fleas crawling up the mud and chipped plaster, set Howard's tongue to swelling syrup-thick.

Only two weeks without a job and doors flap back hard enough to shut themselves on the swing back. Diesel doesn't undo any bags, leaving them in the trunk, thinking himself a man to be reckoned with. Diesel says to Liam Lake: "Everything is a game. Coming late to dinner is a game. Going to church is a game. So start packing, Champ."

At a rest stop a few skips outside of South Dakota, Diesel pours into the pay-phone his last stash of silver from the job he quit with no notice upon leaving Port Larvis. He imagines his Her cralling the phone on her shoulder, swatting at someone else down bout her thighs, nodding and swishing her yeses, all the while waiting for the quarters to run dry.

Back on the highway, swooping down the ramp above roofops, Marisa, with bit lip, bores her eyes into the insides of houses, t the lit-up windows, frames for dusty tables and dresser drawers. Liam Lake says in Minnesota that their noses appear to be caving in, that Marisa, her matted hair a mess of withered roses, looks like someone had put their hand on the top of her head and pushed own, bending her back at the nape of her neck.

A strip of flatland, a mudslide somewhere: nobody but Howard notices the name; as if by names and month-long stays, the rhythms of the place get into the dish water and spark up your fingers, as if by names, the slant to their tongues becomes your ant, as if by a month, the people start knowing your shadow from the swing in your step, the story of where Liam Lake got his swift ft hook. Marisa cooks cod and cranberries to celebrate Howard's

coming home with the landscaping job.

Howard tells them, cranberry juice dripping out his lip, about knowing which plants grow in sun and which in shade, about which plants grow in acidic soil and which plants don't. Marisa bends her head to look like she's listening, her eyes all set to shining over.

Describe it as the swim of fish through ribs at a first kiss her way of loving the cold-water flat. Name it a blush she feels riding from her hands to her hair when she combs the yard-wide strip of virgin soil outside, the tingle in her heels when it softens for a side of sunflowers.

After a month, Diesel stops putting his shoes back in his suitcase before he sleeps. Liam Lake takes to looking for the trail of a dog with a lopsided lope, thinking it might like the leg of lamb leftover from a stew.

Work goes so well that Howard comes home topsy-turvy with tips on tulips and two-bit tractors, a man of know-how and style, knowledge to the nines.

"Dad, I need to start looking for a job. Dad, okay?" Diesel says, knowing how sentences sound in Howard's ear - playing like record rounding about at the wrong speed, crushed sound shot out wrong from afar: the same twelve words spawning new slips of tongue, a twist in the ear: "Daod, ai neeed too staort lowking forwa joab.Daod, owkaai?Daod, ai neeed too staort lowking forwa joab.DaodDaod." A theory of sound looming from long before, theory tumbling out from a barber shop scene, that time when his dad drove the truck into the storefront glass, and skidded away before anyone could scribble down his plate. A man in the shop had coughed in his dad's direction, not stopping it by lifting his fist to his mouth, spawning germs on his dad's shirt. His dad saw with his light-bending eyes the germs crawl and stick to his clothes. *The man had planned it all along, in-cahoots with the hair-cutter.* The truck through the storefront fixed that.

No school, no work until we get settled. This is a game Diesel, isn't it. Don't think I don't know what you're trying to do. You should know better.

Days later, Howard drags Diesel to ask for a job at the lan-

escaping firm, subtracting a few numbers from the year of his birth. Diesel works with fingers which flow at machine speed, so hard that his father has to come home and tell Liam Lake to help out around the house more. Liam looks like his legs are growing out from the television dial, his sock sprung from the screen, his mouth wed to the antenna, his tooth bucked up on bottom rim, armbone blow-torched to the volume button.

Liam Lake scratches his nose.

Watch those gestures, Liam. Even when I don't look at you, I can see you. I can see you with the second eye I have, hear every word you say with my second ear. I can slap you with my third hand.

Up the hill, Diesel finds his father listening to the Boss.

"Howard, come on. I only ast you to clip them hedges because you're good at it. Of course I don't have nothing against you. For real, tomorrow you can have your pick of jobs, for real."

Howard spins around to Diesel who knows his dad had heard something separate from what the boss had said - *let's go*.

On the way home, racing through red lights, Howard says - *vell, did you hear that? Did you listen to that low-life DiBucci lie brough his no-good yellow teeth to me about what he was doing! Tell ne you didn't notice the way he favored them Rawlins boys. Tell me my elling wasn't on the tip of your tongue! Tell me you couldn't smell that litch-digging, DiBucci a mile away.*

The sound of sirens sends Howard spinning through a yard and hedge-splitting behind a garage. He tears through tulip patches.

He turns the key, telling Diesel to get down.

The police sirens waddle around the corner, wither. Wait, Howard says, still as straight pin, *wait*. They're trying to bait us. Diesel looks at his watch.

A half-hour later, Howard says, *They're playing a waiting game.*

An hour later, he hands the keys to Diesel. *You drive.*

Diesel feels the car curve across the roads, curb-cutting and crossing the yellow line, Howard cautioning, *watch it!*

"DiBucci had his head in the soil. You could tell it, the way he watched the clipping and the mowing and the blowing as if it

didn't actually happen, mumbled about the lip about things to say to the client." Diesel says, skipping steps to the apartment door.

Howard stalls at the foot of the stairs, skin sharpening about the jaw. *Say what, Diesel? Say you think some dago knows how to run a shop better than me?*

"Noaw, nowah, nowah.. daod..."

Marisa's jaw slacks mid-sentence when she comes in the door.

"You're home early," she says.

*No. No, Marisa. Where were you?*

"Church."

A moment. Another. Diesel traces patters into the couch with his fingertip. Liam Lake scratches his wrist.

*Let's talk about God,* Marisa, Howard says. *This god of yours loses my job and sends a policeman on my tail. Ask Diesel if you don't believe me. Tell me there's a just God that lets that happen...*

Marisa closes the door and walks close to him.

He turns away.

On the highway, Diesel denies the road. He looks through Liam Lake beside him, feels himself fall through the car seat beneath him. Sometimes the moon is a streetlamp out a window. Name it streetlight; call it a moon. He's only sure of the shininess through the shade, the shadows of cars slicing up train tracks, silver slats, train tracks, on the walls.

Half a year into New Orleans, Marisa grows into the most beautiful woman Diesel ever saw. Ask Liam Lake: she's the Most Beautiful Woman in New Orleans. Orange juice and hot-cross bun streak every Sunday; Sundays bleed a low blue-red, a stained-glass frame for the keeping. Liam Lake can walk - blindfolded and spin around three times - down the block, bending down back streets across the tracks to the white-steepled church, in squeaky shoes and hand-me-down finery. The cat, Snowball, tears up the trash on the streets on Tuesdays. Nobody minds.

A woman Howard met in the hospital thinks he's her son. She salutes him in gibberish, touching his cheek and saying, *Georgia Longstraw, yellow heartpine.* Then his ears swell up with pain and he can't hear from the rush RUSH rush RUSH of thunder.

bubbling against his eardrum to the outside. A shuddering, the nurse pulling at the blue bag beside his bed. *Look at that ole nurse, fightin that turkey.* It could be Thanksgiving. She could be his sister, chasing the headless bird around the yard for dinner.

When he's well, he'll spring out of this room like a spark blown skyward. When he's well, he'll be his best friend in the universe, and then some. When he's well, Marisa will be the Queen of the Dimes. *How'd the nurse end up in the hospital on Christmas Eve?*

*Bet she's getting time and a half.*

Marisa in the doorway is a peat fire in the spring.

*Come here*, he says. He finds her wrist and drops his nails around under her veins and squeezes until his nails meet each other through her skin.

When she screams, his ears have gone clean.

*So you are real, after all.*

The nurse in the doorway is the worst kind of nothing, a wall of bricks over the window.

Marisa says, hey. Marisa walks over and whispers to her. His new ears find "time alone together", "please", "but its New Year's Eve!" The wall of bricks in the window shuts the door as she leaves.

*Did you know we only have nine hours of day? Did you know that the moon, full and round as an old television breathing out blue light, was the last Christmas full moon over earth until centuries after you will have died?*

In the morning, Marisa is a blister in his mouth.

"What are knives for?" She holds a pill over the trash.

*Bread, butter*, he says.

"What is rope for?" She still hasn't dropped it.

*Securing luggage.*

"See, it is already in your mouth." She chuckles the pillbox at his pillowcase.

When she smiles, all the light from the outside strikes through the room. Christmas doesn't happen here, but she is glowing, a tree in the window, the dove blown out the chimney.

*Kate Zangrilli*

# cat lives

---

you have stretched out  
your cat lives.  
two have lost  
of iron bathtubs, of ghettos.  
and quite the killer with that  
(that ...) pretty Southern Thing you do,  
standing ten feet tall and  
strung up pearls (you know it's true)  
and my house is just spooks an' mischief.  
rattlin' 'round in thar.  
oh, somedays they do provide for comfort.  
with kerchief and parasol  
a prince in so many words.

and somedays hollow.  
liquor-heavy breath and all  
just a' catchin' up to yer fancy at'ributes.  
stitched up with bright, bright  
copper veins.  
your chest maps out  
each life into a purrfect chime.  
you carry your souls,  
your shirtsleeves.

*Erik Jungbacker*

# The Remains

---

Or, should you wish it, the  
conversational tone that comes from  
two drinks,

As fall faded into  
water, you shouted across the  
yard. The dream began, I  
gasped, and the fire came.

Again tonight I dreamt the dream  
at the telescope, stretching across the  
sky, across the aether or, unfocused, on a  
pink painting of jonquils in May.

Years recede or fall like water  
below the ebb. That anthropomorphic Eisenhower.  
In spring we fall to the glass, hoping to trap the moon,  
moment, thistle, redolent of burgeoning flowers,  
the grass before summer that harbored  
that musty unfulfillment, coming to catch  
us again, ever again.

A series of notes as the foot  
falls, this is the one for whom you  
juggle the sciences. All the time I walk  
though the snow hoping for the chance  
at you, Winter ends summarily  
and with little circumstance; those dormant  
arise to the sounds of pattering. What was it  
Robert Graves wrote?

She tells her love while half asleep,

In the dark hours  
With half-words whispered low  
As earth stirs in her winter sleep  
and puts out grass and flowers  
Despite the snow,

Despite the falling snow.

A fogged window at twilight,  
the time before dusk when the sun is broad  
and tumbling to its orange death. Sometimes,  
I sit, others I stand, but there is always  
something falling as when the world flies on  
invisible axes like so much rain, so much twilight.

In my best moments, I lay in the  
cool dawn, thinking of plurality and  
the key which locks capitals of the first  
person plural, the first time we met  
and the heat of metal when  
it is evident or, alternately  
a small, exquisite painting by Poussin-  
industry, wealth, poverty, hedonism, The  
rich colors of two triangles that emerge,  
the bifocals he wore. Maybe that was Chardin  
Sometimes I wish I were  
a painter, as Frank O'Hara said, because then  
I (Grant Wood, no) could wear blue without  
green, I could foreshorten badly or paint  
wine falling on a sleeve. Summer air  
is full of children, statues, roofs,  
and snow. And Ludwig Richter,  
with his circles and circles of  
emotions, top to bottom, coming  
from the far barrier.

This is what we come to, in the end.  
Disjoined A's and H's. Correspondence  
without correspondent, iron without ochroid,  
summer without lightning, 13th without December.  
I will be happy with reciprocity.  
The woods are lovely-dark and deep-  
indeed, paradigm of common experience.

The adumbration of the lights at Christmas,  
a glittering necklace, the glittering pfizes, not  
that Rafael had intended. Finally, here  
they lie, the remains of the old life, the  
other world, where it was you and I and  
Rostropovich and that, as you said was art-  
why didn't I quit but again, there we were  
a row of nickels, Duffell, Veyne, Lowell,  
Hopkins, Lowell, Forster, Wodehouse, Austen,  
the swirling winds, swirling sounds.

I never though I could be as strong as this.  
It is all for you. These rocks, waters, seas.  
Again, finally, always, we lie, in last sun,  
immortal, for the final arrival, and our knuckles white.  
A line of our own, piercing  
Florence, a dream of patterns  
across the sky again for you, one more time for you.

*Charlie Finch*



*Jan Smejkal*

# Goethe Dreams of Ottilie

---

"Turn it how one will, one always imagines oneself seeing. I think we dream solely to prevent ourselves from ceasing to see." Goethe, Elective Affinities

My hands are all that  
are warm  
pressed together, thumb gripping  
thumb  
webs of skin stretch and bend.  
But my feet wear scales  
cold, cold-blooded  
soaking in the hardest air, soaking in the space  
beneath the chair, marked in Nauman's concrete.

Between my palms, their fortune lines,  
this warmth builds,  
and there I am in my hands,  
(my hands become my body,  
and the sounds are everything else);  
each twitch, scratch, turn  
is magnified. These loud sounds, too,  
are my hands and the air,  
pressure at the thumb and middle finger  
the tooth in the gum and  
only the breathing  
and every turn of the neck exist.

Sweeping scenes, sweeping, covering  
and then in very close  
to a face moving in a moment  
like this, hearing bones  
and cartilage deep within.  
The feet can warm

and uncurling are stuck  
in the space  
and afraid of the noise  
of the magnitude and of meaning.

I.

Distilled perhaps into this  
gash in the yellow wallpaper,  
thickly curved legs and pasted upholstery  
overhung and fingered  
by a tilting painting, pyramidal balance destroyed  
against the wood grain. Its circular canvas  
and the coloring of the woman at the center  
recall Ingres and his Turkish baths  
in a much bigger building.  
And there is the circle beneath it,  
globe in its turning stand,  
a grossly fat South America, elongated Africa,  
fitted, notched, strung on  
helpless brass rollers.  
We look up, over the overturned irises  
and dusted tea service  
into the bay window  
expecting the ocean  
to the molding as it gaps from the floor.

II.

The arch I used to draw  
pulling eyebrow over eye  
and down a line to the nose,  
nursery's Picasso (also Gorky's woman painter)  
seen so clearly today in a face.  
Stylization is never simplification,  
the head seemed all the more complex.  
It was the lines and the painter's frame,  
like bent-back thumb  
or curve in the river.

It was nature and math and pure bone  
rattling from inside against the skin.

III.

In January  
when days begin already  
to grow noticeably longer,  
the dusk is gray  
rather than blue.

I've heard that the cashew  
is a legume,  
but its tree is  
of the Sumac family.

Giant needles, elongated drops  
of metal, arms held in with palms up  
planted like dripping stalks,  
were used by the Dogon people  
to call the rain.

IV.

Repetition goes hand  
in hand with uniqueness.  
Geometries, snowflakes, and  
many tear drops,  
“Printmaking mimics what we are  
as humans: . . . all the same  
and yet every one different.”  
What we call a tree, what a child  
draws, stiff trunk with a squirrel’s hole,  
ruffled bush atop,  
when you can only draw one face—  
corners and categories ensconce each real thing,  
so that beneath the squirrel’s hole  
and stiff trunk, we see not only  
what we can recognize

but also what we cannot.

Plato believed all horses  
to have been formed from the mold  
of the ideal horse, every horse a shadow  
of The Horse, and every horse  
housing its own imperfections  
which make it a shadow and not the first.  
I believe all days to be the same,  
a list, identical boxes.  
But some days it rains,  
and some days the sun rises at 6:18  
instead of at 6:30.  
And each day we recognize  
what the day before we could not.

*Kate Nesin*

# At a Table Drinking Tea

---

Streams of lighted drops  
dangle from pole to tree  
reflecting in window, reflecting in window  
spouting from lamppost  
looping across entryways

a woman in her tall black boots catches the shine  
on her leather  
beads fall from  
the glossy shopping bags  
banging her thigh  
with every step      by  
as  
the blue glow of bus  
sweeps      by  
catching pearls in her windshield

the tortoise shell glassed woman  
with hands that talk  
also drinking from a crimson rimmed cup  
tells her friend about  
her lover's other lover  
while  
I sip from the chilled cup  
the tannin coating my palette  
my cheek pressed to the glass  
looking at the woman and the buses and myself-  
reflected  
on a sidewalk, on a crosswalk  
the ashtray, the fake marble table  
the chipped pot and cup, curled into my hands  
the dog eared book I pretend to read sometimes  
this poem

the lady with the hands that talk  
nurses her coffee with milk into the cement  
I write on curb stones  
and get cut  
by smoke trailing women  
dragging children or lovers

and the lights reflect off bus and car windows  
in my own eyes, reflecting

*Kim Pope*



*Lisa Lake*

# **“freshness of the voices...”**

---

freshness of the voices  
piercing ‘cross the trees  
the voices caged in class  
the trees tied up in leaves  
while the wind above is blowing  
students all caught up in knowing  
wish their lives would go a’marching  
marching on.  
their footsteps to a rhythm:  
marching song.  
if you can shout most shrilly  
and your answer’s the most right  
then you’ll be the first to suffocate  
in weighty, shady spite.  
and if your heart’s a’sleeping  
an anticipation brew  
let’s sit down, talk some shit  
heart-tea for two,  
our caffeinated nerves a’wearing through;  
i’m twice as ready to bust out as you.

*Hillary Dresser*



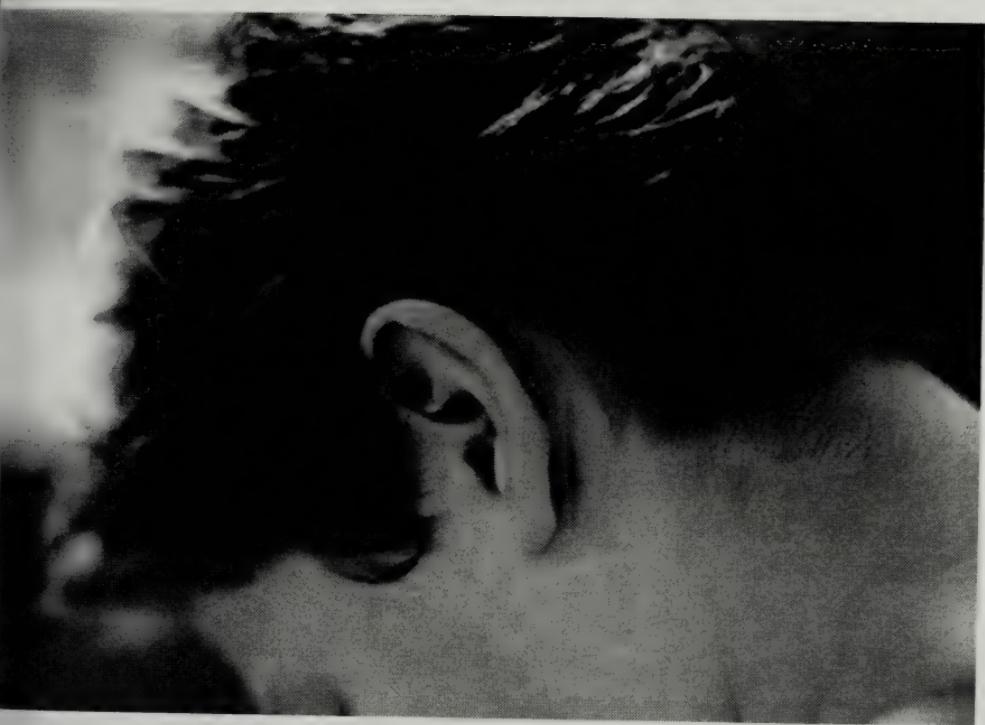
*Shivani Reddy*

# boy

---

He is unmistakably a little boy,  
with a broad flat back—  
his shoulders are outposts  
of his torso—  
the lines of his neck  
reveal that it is a vase  
with hair spilling gently from the top  
like wilting flowers—  
his small legs stream from his hips  
and his knees aim inward  
as he sits,  
begging his whole body  
to crouch into fetal position—

*Michael Chagnon*



*Mimi Tseng*

## “life beat...”

---

life beat  
strong beat  
heart beats  
lung breathes  
nigh time  
is right time  
fire light  
ice white  
chance licks  
change ticks  
and a girl marching through snow  
with boy and life in tow.

*Hillary Dresser*

# **“Arched...”**

---

Arched  
Tail  
Outlined in white  
Fur.  
hands on  
The Acorn.  
The smallest  
Tree.

*Debbie Schwartz*

# **“...We must go and work in the garden.”**

---

“...we must go and work in the garden.”

-Voltaire in *Candide*

The sun has not touched the garden yet,  
but those who remember past a day's eternity  
recall its distant glare.

The sun has not touched the garden yet,  
and the flowers there revel in their dormancy,  
kept safe from the outside rumblings  
of rickshaw revolutions.

A spectacled gardener  
clad in proletarian blue  
digs in the darkness  
hands worn by the burden of  
lost opulence.

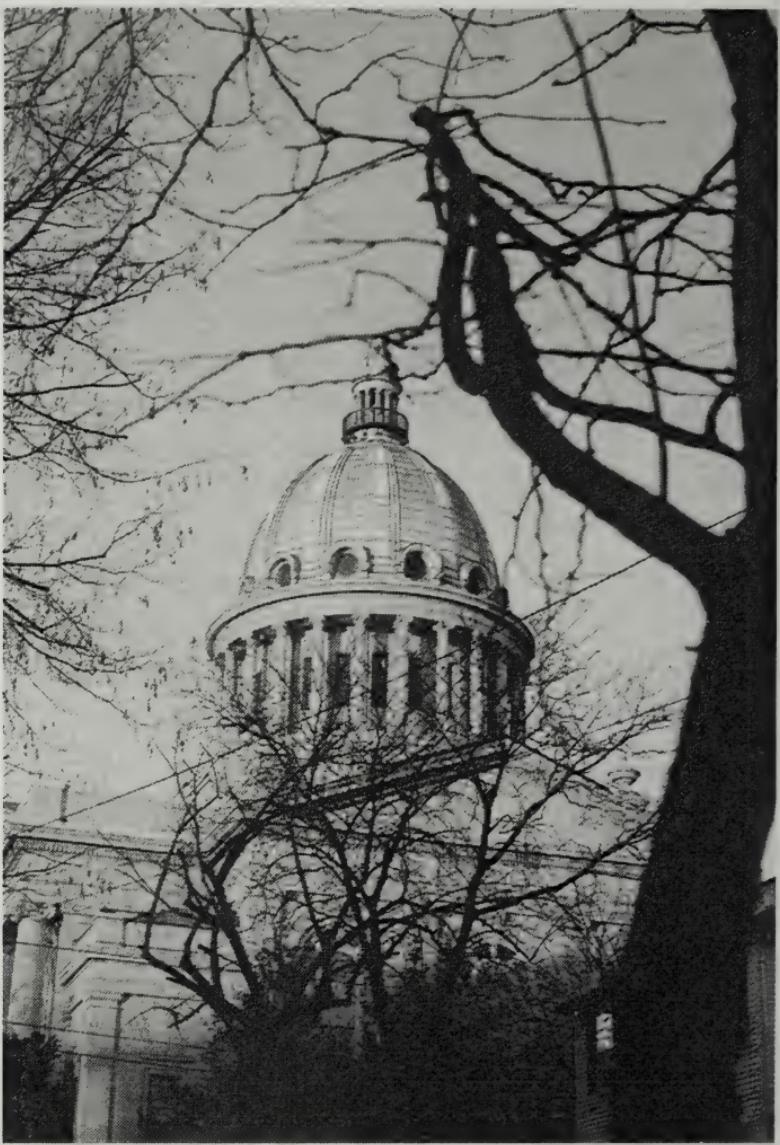
His weary eyes,  
accustomed to the night,  
long not for vanished glories.  
Only the flowers await  
the splendor of sunset  
that knowing ex-emperors  
can call revenge.

The sun has not touched the garden yet  
and the flowers there remain unheard,  
but the tired stoics  
begin to yearn  
searching the east for  
unfolding prophecies  
kept secret in the rhythm

of the sun, the tide,  
and rickshaw revolutions.

Inspired by the film *The Last Emperor* ( directed  
by Bernardo Bertolucci)

*Matt O'Brien*



*Ariel Lambe*

# Wenceslas Square

---

'Twas a quiet morning,  
'Twas there but little warning,  
When the mind was churning,  
And the body was burning,

Wenceslas Square

But he was but a boy,  
with a life devoid of joy,  
He heard the desperation calling,  
and his star began falling,  
When the mind was churning.  
and the body was burning

Wenceslas Square

A student repulsing the practice,  
Perhaps he did miss,  
A freedom he never had,  
Sweet Jesus, Commy's bad,  
Churning,  
Burning,

Wenceslas Square.

And so good King,  
What in hell were *you* doing?  
Whilst he was churning,  
Whilst he was burning,

dear Wenceslas?

It happened ar your base,  
Not to change your face,  
Done in your name,  
But you didn't care, did you,  
sweet Weceslas?

But why are you leige and lord,  
Because you were good with the sword?  
No, ye were great,  
ye changed the fate,  
O! Czech mates.

Good Wenceslas.  
And so the people worship,  
a spirit of bad rip,  
Sweet Jesus, what happened there?  
What does it matter when you don't care?  
Are you sick Wenceslas?  
Sick Indeed,  
Bid well to the good seed,  
and the thin reed,  
That which lay churning,  
A body burning,  
And for you!  
At Wenceslas Square.

*Dan Sullivan*

# Don Jibaro

---

The brown soul of the island  
slaves en el campo  
day after day  
sunrise to sunset  
he tends to the field  
making it his life  
His pain is shown  
by the 9 platano fingers  
of his soft rock hands  
and the rivers  
carved along his face  
providing channels  
for the bodies of sweat  
He never washes away  
the stain and the pain  
of the past 506 years  
on his sparse attire  
trigueno skin and tattered soul

Soy jibaro  
Soy Puerto Rico en corazon y alrna  
y tu tambien  
he silently grunts to his invisible jibarito son  
because he wears his stain proudly  
Looking at the box upon the box  
with sullen eyes  
he watches highlights  
of the 2nd Sunday in June  
pondering the difference  
from 1868  
Seeing the blind intelligence  
unchanneled emotion  
and unjust satisfaction  
of the 2 million portogringos

lets him know that it's time  
contra ignorance  
contra assimilation  
contra prop 187  
contra enghsh only  
contra AmeriKKKa

Don Jibaro peers into  
the red - amber sunset  
of el jibarito eyes in el Bronx  
and tells him silently

El segundo grito es necesario ahora  
para salvar la gente puertorriqueña y tu tambien  
La futura es en tus manos mijo

After his message  
he rests in his splintery oak rocking chair  
inhales hope  
exhalas his fear  
grabs his machete Ana  
and awaits

*Anthony Morales*



*Ariel Lambe*

# The Infinite Jest

Mystic train rollin' through the night,  
Hundred miles a day,  
You know it's a million mile flight.

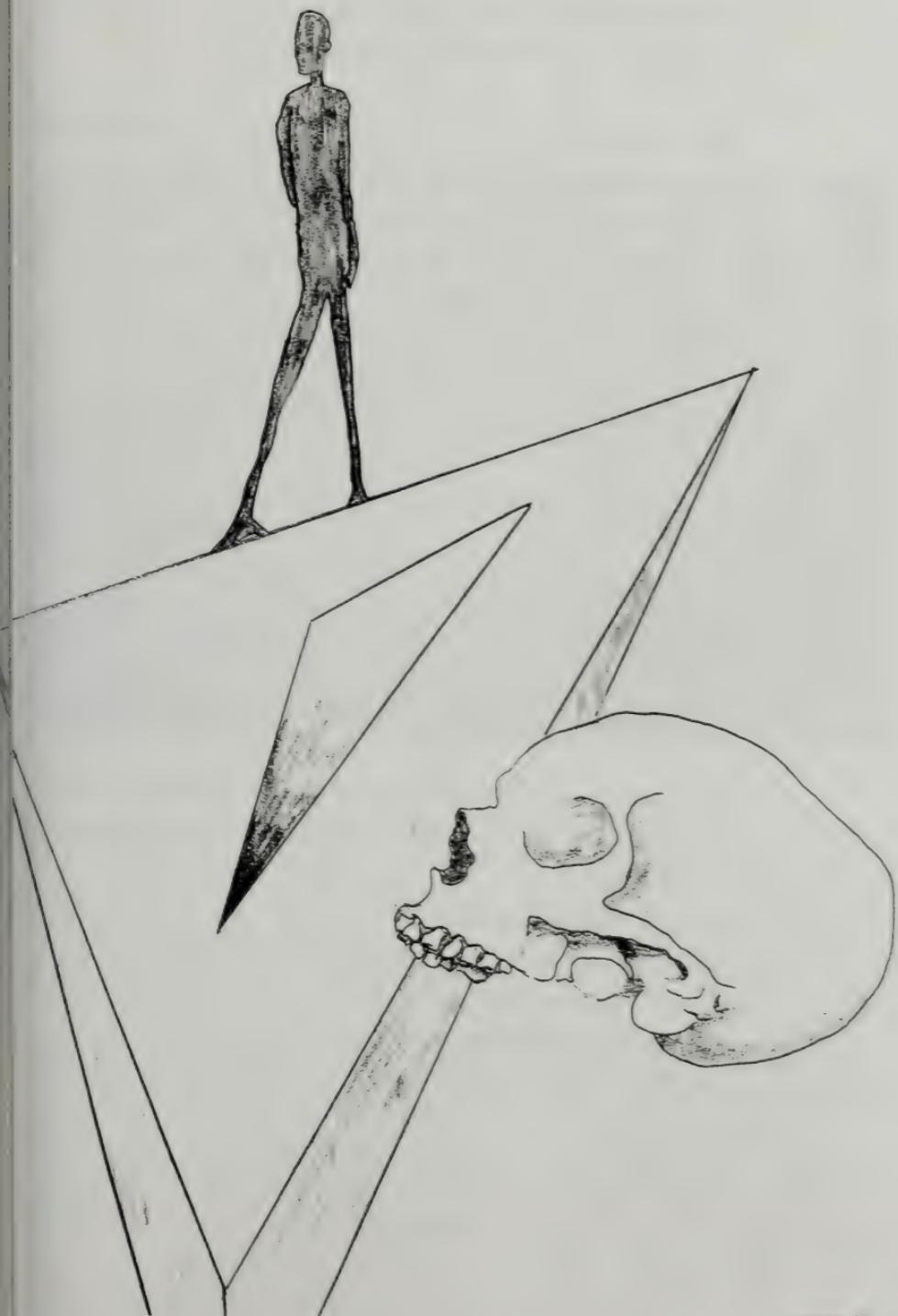
Jack the ragged jester in the court of the homely king,  
You know who's in charge of this thing,  
It's Jack on his chess pawn horse,  
It's he who plots our crazy course,  
Through the lonely mountains of father time,  
Changes direction on a dirty silver dime,  
Where this train's rollin', only Jack knows,  
Where his jest takes us, where his breath blows.

Mystic train rollin' through the night,  
Hundred miles a day,  
You know it's a million mile flight.

Jack's back, now on the winedark sea,  
Plowin' through the waves, his breath sets us free,  
"But are we free? " the black crow raves,  
You know our fate lies deep beneath the waves,  
Jack knows this, let's us know all the time,  
Tells us with his wild reason and rhyme,  
Jack reports to the king each day,  
But who's the king? Jack gets his way.

Mystic train rollin' through the night,  
Hundred miles a day,  
You know it's a million mile flight.

*Patrick Morrissey*



Dan Addison

## Two Sisters

---

September with her carved out eyes  
Servile January bending before the year

One, the first, held a bleeding dagger mixed with the  
venom of her abrasive, indulgent anger.

The monotony of her days stretched out before me like  
the crimson welts running up and down her  
outstretched arms,

Until autumn scratched and scraped me with her metal  
burrs,

Shocking me back into existence.

The other, the Sycophantic Sister,

She held a confusing sky in her lap, pressed close to her  
womb.

Sunset's scarlet lifeblood was smeared across the frozen  
stillness of winter night,

And shadowy thoughts darted furtively through the dark.

January's scent is the cleanest, purest smell on earth,  
Unfettered by the sickly sweet incense of summer  
breezes,

By fall's dusty leaves,

By spring's fresh perfume of life.

Winter air is cold,

Its wind mordant and harsh,

As if purified by pain.

*Ann Lin*



*Ariel Lambe*

## “Ad Pyrrhum” (adapted from Horace 1.5)

---

What poor slim girl is it now, Pyrrhus,  
drenched in sweet cloying perfume, who waits on your  
pleasure,  
all roses, in your lair?  
For whom do you brush back  
your wicked gold hair,

simple in elegance? Lord, now she'll scream  
out her fate soon enough, and she'll see  
how cruel snap your black whims,  
that soft-eyed child

who now trusts in your mercy, in you, gold,  
who prays for your sweetness, and time,  
she who's never seen a false wind  
kill a sailor. God save the virgins  
who see your eyes shine.

The sacred wall shows yet, on my inscriptions,  
I hung my torn and dripping clothes, in votive  
to your Ocean's vicious god.

*Amy O'Neal*

# If He Had Done it With His Hands...

I bet that anyone in the room could say that they know a girl who lets her boyfriend treat her badly. In fact, I know we all could, 'cause there are girls like that everywhere. I don't know how they'd ever get to a point where they feel like they can take it, I know I couldn't, but they always seem to rationalize everything. Maybe its not so much rationalizing as only remembering the good stuff. I guess it doesn't really matter. I guess they learn it from their mothers or their sisters and just don't even know what they are doing. "God", you say to yourself, "it's sooo obvious what he's doing to her, why does she let him do that? Some girls are really desperate..." But when you come down to it, it's easier for them not to see what's happening than to see, know what I mean?

There was this girl that I knew once. She was gorgeous, you know, perfect body, perfect skin...the works. There were guys falling all over her when she stepped out of the apartment. It was sick, it really was. Well anyway, as I was saying, this girl—she had this boyfriend. Yeah, he was cute, but he was the kind of guy who knows he's cute, so he sort of lost that "innocent" look, if you know what I mean. They were together for a long time.

Sometimes he would send her flowers. Sometimes his face lit up when he saw her coming. Sometimes he said things to her that made her heart melt right out of her chest. Sometimes he bought her pretty things, and sometimes he told her that she looked nice. It happened. I am not denying that it happened, but there was a lot more to the story than that.

Most of the time he made her feel like she belonged scraping dirt off of the bottom of the world. When she asked questions, strictly by way of making good conversation, he would make her feel like her brain had momentarily hitched a ride out of town. He talked about other girls in front of her even though he knew that he was head-over-heels for him, that she would do anything for him, and that the thing that bothered her most was the idea of him being with another girl. See, she had gotten to that point where she depended on him for her self-confidence. He knew that. He knew

that all too well, so he dealt the blows. It almost seemed like he thrived on her suffering. Through it all, she just kept on smiling. She never let him see how much he was hurting her. Now it seems to me like he knew exactly how much he was making her wriggle. "I've heard enough," you're saying to yourself, "when are we going to get to the juicy stuff? The beating? The revenge? The victory for all womankind?" Sorry ladies. There's something you gotta understand. There's no beating in this story. There's no suicide. There's no cutting of the vitals with a sharp-edged knife—no happy ending. See this girl, she just got to a point where she couldn't keep the wool over her eyes anymore. She couldn't hide under that stupid, plastic, smiling mask and take it. She lost herself to him. After all of that, after all she did for him and was willing to give him, he left her. "That's understandable," you say, "People fall out of love, right?" I guess that I can agree, people do, but not like this. That beautiful girl that walked into his arms walked out feeling like the ugliest girl on Earth. That smart girl that took the first bite of dinner on that first date walked out of their apartment after dinner for the last time feeling like the stupidest girl that ever lived. That skin that started out so radiant, glowing with the promise of love and "happily-ever-after" ended up pale and drawn like one of those ceramic clown dolls. The eyes are what get me the worst, though. Her eyes used to be this clear, blue-green-gray color that invited the world into them, and now they are red-rimmed and indifferent. Indifference is the biggest bomb there is. The worst part of it all is that he didn't do the damage with his hands. If he had done it with his hands, she would have noticed before she lost herself. He did it with his words and his looks. He did it when he was trying to put on a show for his friends or when he felt so bad about himself that it made him feel better to abuse her. If he had done it with his hands, her older brother would have beat him down, and that would have been the end of that. If he had done it with his hands, she wouldn't have been able to ignore it for so long. Love makes you blind sometimes, I guess. That's what I think, anyway. It must be because if she had seen what he was doing to her, if she had seen what she was turning into, if she had known how many times he would make her cry, and how hard, she wouldn't even have given

him a second glance, because she is better than that. She is a million times better than what he made her feel like, a million times...only she sees through his eyes now.

*Julia Galaburda*

# “Jason’s Birthday, Up at Camp”

Down in the Brownie unit, one night,  
we all had to get out our sleeping bags  
and sleep in the big screened-in place.  
The head counselor lady said to us  
Tonight it's Jason's birthday. Tonight  
we're gonna try to keep y'all safe, but Jason  
might come around.

There weren't any big Girl Scouts  
in the big Girl Scouts' cabins, out up  
in the woods, by the lake.  
Not tonight. Earlier, maybe, before.  
Not tonight. Not on Jason's birthday.

They said the big Girl Scouts  
went somewhere else, on account of  
it was dangerous, up in those tiny,  
cold cabins, by the rockfall down the lake,  
on Jason's birthday.

Lara was bad. She kept on saying  
just some guy, it's just some man  
they have. I waited for death,  
half asleep. Lara said she'd bite  
his dingie off, if he came in here.

Which he didn't. But he tried.  
Banged on the screen, banged on the walls  
About an hour later. Saw his paper mask  
and the hatchet, saw him pressed against  
the screen, and snarling at us.  
Tried to say: Come in here, and I'll kill you,

I'll kill you. Strangled in me, sniveling,  
it came out, He's faking. 'S gotta be faking it,  
he's a goddamned, 's gotta be a goddamned  
man, he's got a axe, he's got, he's a liar,  
liar, Tara, liar.

Tall blond girl — Tara, counselor — had Lara  
on her Barbie sleeping bag, holding, rocking  
back and forth with her, and saying, not Jason,  
he's just a man from down the hill, in Grenada,  
he's going home now, to his house, and his kids.  
It's okay. It's okay. It's okay, hon.

*Amy O'Neal*

# James Brown Body

Jess'ca with her little black forget-me-nots taped around  
her thigh  
and her breasts paling over her waisted towel  
like loaves of honeysuckle  
erected              nectared              necked  
                                high

she has blanched her way to beds  
hulling boys and vampires  
(and some things in-between)  
teeth half-drawn, her wounds half-constructed  
and her heart half-gone, pittered somewhere dangerous  
where a green, gothed man made a coin wish on it  
drowned it in a well with  
silvered slips of desire and bloated pocket lint.

Jess'ca barrels amber beer down her stomach,  
shakes a wicked hand of magic splayed fingers  
in front  
in back  
of her jamming James Brown Body,  
strips her jeans where streams  
of goosebumps line her skin, howls high-pitched like a  
puppy  
on a night where she rides the beached surfboard  
in an ice-tangled pond

she knows the earth is her mother  
and how to shred chivalry...  
but can she collapse herself?  
Without armor stand  
                            plush and still  
in front of a face so intense with long songs of need  
drawing out from under the bone?

She blades herself, depth ringing around her tongue  
(lust rotting with fatigue)  
stands like a hollow castle knight,  
blackness creaking through her joints  
still... but vanished.

*Caitlin Berrigan*

## **Anna Maria Island Martinique**

Gloon-grounded bronzed bodies  
pulling at the sun like a baby pounds its mother's breast,  
they are filled and brimmed with  
"the good life"  
their bones and busts and brains transforming into  
fat gorillas peeling coloured sunset strips off mangoes and  
sucking on fruit.

(Every day do they?)  
Shock their hot breath onto the pages of a newspaper  
(that eventually soak away)

*a plane has exploded from the belly out and  
plummeted like a sky-jumping thigh-pumping plum from  
space*

"Shucks. People are crazy,"  
they say in a whir of  
suntan-lotioned, coconut-creamed eagle breath.

Their feet snap over piles of clean curved shells on  
the beach  
their jogging shoes with even rubber soles  
can't glosssss over this decomposition in silence  
and their heart beats can't clock out  
the splitting of crabclaw and backbone against backbone

Caitlin Berrigan

# **“Conching for Tourists”**

---

Gus Harrison had captained a conch boat on Martha's Vineyard for 17 years, until the government banned the capture of conchs because they had become too rare. Gus and every other Island conch fisherman had to find a “more ecologically compatible” livelihood. A government brochure suggested “tourist industry entrepreneurship”. Its author hadn't had the nerve to jump out and say “get a better job, say, selling shirts to the nice New York kids sitting in their parents' Land Cruisers.”

Gus didn't consider selling souvenirs or hiring himself out. He had never worked for anyone but himself and saw no reason to change now.

He had thought about that and his mate from his second year of conching had come to his mind. The mate had been a college dropout from Boston who had taken it unto himself to educate Gus in Marxism. He had deliberately ignored most of it, but wage slavery had stuck in his mind, even though the kid had kept saying that Gus didn't understand what the term meant. Marx was right to describe most labor as wage slavery. Any job he could get himself hired into would be agonizingly bleak after conching.

Gus thought about what he could do. It would involve tourists- there was no getting around that. Catering to tourists had had to be rationalized- once, he had stuck an “If You Don't Live Here, Go Home” bumper sticker on his boat's cabin. Tourists were foolish. But they also had money.

The Marxist kid had called Gus an idealist. Gus decided, in the interest of his survival, to stop being one. Ideal things did not exist. His ideal Island didn't have 100,000 people on it in summer. The actual Island he lived on did, though. He finally understood, with necessity tramping up his back, that he couldn't control things like tourists. He realized that his ideals were incompatible with reality, so he abandoned them.



Conching had been officially banned in January, and afterward Gus had spent a month living aimlessly. The novelty of unemployment waned once doing nothing became routine. An idea struck him in late February. Preparations, interrupted sometimes by ghosts of his old ideals, occupied him until the opening day of his new venture.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Ride An Authentic Conch Boat. Experience A Piece Of Real New England" barely fit on the sign Gus leaned against a piling. "New England" was squished, making the final "and" look like a combined d and m. His boat was the same as it always had been: crummy, fishy. It bobbed up and down next to the same pier it had for 17 years, a wharf in central Edgartown within throwing distance of the Chappaquidick Ferry. Two other fishing boats were tied at either end of his. Gus was prepared for his new job, not that the preparations were many.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Christ, Gus, you're really doing this?" Doug Grayson tapped the Authentic Conch Boat sign. Doug had a tough time believing that Gus was going through with his plan.

Gus, sarcastically: "I only got the passenger license because I felt like standing in line." He paused. "Yeah, I'm really doing it."

"I still can't see you with tourists."

"Get used to it. Next thing you know the government'll ban lobster trapping and you'll be hawking T-shirts."

"Not gonna happen. They president likes lobster."

"You never know."

"I know all right. The government wouldn't kick me off my job if lobsters started glowing purple in the dark."

Gus pulled a Budweiser from the cooler beside him.

"So you're going to put up with tourists?" Doug asked

"You're not going to push 'em off the boat when you're in the middle of the harbor or something, are you?"

"I'm giving them rides, Doug."

"I can see you as a guide. There's Edgartown light, and over there's Ernie Boch's house," he prodded Gus, "I used to think that place had so many windows that it was uglier than a conch, but for your benefit I'll say it's damn impressive. How 'bout that folks?"

"Go stick your head in your lobster tank."

"Don't take stuff so seriously..." Doug looked at the cabin.  
"What'd you do with that sticker?"

"Which one?"

"The tourist sticker."

"I painted over it when I cleaned up the boat."

"So I guess your first idea's been put off now."

"The organization thing- you might say that."

"Well, you aren't going to get all of us together to stop the tourist crap now."

"You really thought I was doing that?"

"I had this picture of you standing up on a crate and speaking like Jimmy Hoffa."

Gus leaned back and laughed. He almost dropped his beer.

Doug went on. "It's weird seeing you in the tourist business. Taking families around the Island on Authentic New England Conch Tours. You with all the principles."

"I thought a lot about that, my principles. When you look at them, ideals are only as strong as your weekly check." Gus stopped for a second. "Let's just say if government assistance was a swimming pool, you'd break your neck diving in."

"What you do's your own prerogative."

"I like to look at it that way."

"I'll see you later, Gus. Family hasn't seen me since I went to bed last night."

"Yeah, I'll see you. Got to get in early. Tomorrow's opening day."

"Yup." Doug turned and walked down the pier. "Oh yeah," he snapped around and shouted, "You really think that visitors'll

want to ride a boat that still smells like conch guts?"

"They like something outside the norm every once in a while."

"That's a good one."

\* \* \* \* \*

Next morning Gus got to his boat at 8:00. He set the sign up and stacked a pile of brochures on the gunwale then sat down in a lawn chair on the rear deck. Gus felt a little bit proud of his brochures. They were very professional looking, printed on glossy paper, two pages words and one an Island map showing the routes of his tours. Charges- per passenger, child, family- and hours stood on the back. Reaching out for exposure to as many customers as possible, copies were at stores and kiosks all over the Island,. He had all the tourist places covered.

Gus glanced at the raised spot in the paint where the bumper sticker still was. The words were masked, he saw again, satisfied that they were. G from "go home" was almost visible, but Gus thought he could see it only because he knew the words underneath.

He waited on his lawn chair until his first tourists arrived. A man, forty maybe, wearing khaki shorts and an untucked Black Dog T-shirt (with 1997 printed on the back- new Black Dog stuff pointed him out as a tourist). He spotted the sign and told his family to come with him. He asked Gus about the prices, then about whether he accepted American Express. Gus requested cash. Reluctantly the man produced \$40 from his wallet. He and his family stepped into the boat- Gus noticed that the man's wife and daughter seemed less than thrilled to be boarding a boat that smelled like a fish market cutting board.

As they pulled away from the dock, Gus heard the man's daughter complain: "This thing reeks of fish."

"All fishing boats do," her father replied.

"Maybe," his wife suggested, "we shouldn't be on one."

Gus butted in: "How's your first time on the Island?"

"How'd you know that we hadn't been here before?" th

man asked, surprised.

"I looked at your shirt," Gus said. He faced away from the family, standing at the wheel while they sat towards the very back of the boat on a bench running around the deck where the conch nets had once been emptied.

"Lots of people have Black Dogs."

"Yeah, that's true. But only first-timers have the new ones."

"I thought the Black Dog was popular on Martha's Vineyard."

"It is. With tourists." They didn't speak for a few minutes, and the only noise came from the motor and the splashing water. "It's probably a good idea if we introduce ourselves," Gus broke in, "We can speak a helluva lot easier that way."

"I'm Brian Liefman." Still holding the wheel, Gus turned around halfway to shake hands. "Gus Harrison."

His wife: "Alexandra."

The daughter: "Margo."

After another silence Brian Liefman lazily said, "This *is* more realistic than a trip on that catamaran, you know."

"What do you mean, realistic?" Margo asked confrontationally.

"I mean, this is how real people on Martha's Vineyard live." Gus decided to keep his mouth shut.

Margo Liefman laughed. "Real people on Martha's Vineyard would be doing something better than driving tourists around the island in their boats." Both were quiet for a second, then Margo broke in, "Mr. Harrison, do you think there are too many tourists on Martha's Vineyard?" She said it as if she already knew the answer. Gus guessed that she had seen plenty of other bumper stickers like his.

He glanced down and the raised rectangle of paint, where he could just barely pick out "go home's" G. "Not really," he said hesitantly, "As long as they don't cause trouble they're okay."

"Well I think there are way too many," she shot back.

"That's strange to hear coming from a tourist."

"I don't think so."

"It's hypocritical in a way."

"I can have my opinions."

"Well, let me tell you the one problem I have with tourists-the only one I really have with them. Every single tourist who gets off the ferry will tell you whole heartedly that the person getting off behind him will make the Island too crowded." His eyes never moving from the G, Gus pointed out Oak Bluffs, which appeared from behind a jetty that had hidden it.

*Nathan Littlefield*



*Lisa Lake*

# The Fish Market

frozen faces gape and admonish  
(me)

half drooling, half repulsed  
at the sight of this  
brilliant palette of flesh.

the lean beltfish shows its yellowed teeth  
(an empty threat),  
and the red snapper looks on reproachfully with its  
drunken eyes,  
only the headless mackerel  
is quite sure he is dead.

Crabs - the main attraction of this freak show,  
Fighting for survival in a circular arena,  
still "alive" (cause we like 'em fresh).  
a cruel paradox,  
the strongest are the first to die.

frozen faces,  
all resigned to fate  
except for a lone crab  
who in grim determination  
climbs up the backs of the dying  
step by step.  
slipping and recovering  
he scuttles to the top,  
Only to be snatched by metal tongs,  
Only to slide to his death into the abyss of a brown  
paper bag.  
a very ordinary paper bag.

*Laura Oh*



*Laura Oh*

# “What was it like...”

---

What was it like  
to first eat an orange, mouth  
a color, and a shape so full,  
dense. To feel it, throw it,  
to undress it.

And some of them with blood inside,  
all of them with cells inside,  
pieces, parts, visibly of a whole;

a smooth sour sore  
on the lower gum  
inside the mouth  
against the lip  
broken by teeth.

And water, water by the sea  
salt separate and for the meat.

In 1849 an orange  
in California was three  
dollars and a shirt.

*Kate Nesin*

# Education

---

## 1. Love

it was the year we first learned  
to spell “beautiful”, falling down

in the chase, lips smacking  
on the ground in a kiss tight  
as mother’s purse clasp

on the bus with a tooth-shattered face  
she says: “does it hurt?”  
I say: “it has heat; it comes and goes.”  
she says: “in pangs?”

“in *pangs*.”

## 2. Math

eighteen and one glass of wine  
at six in the evening over the stove fixing  
minute rice for one woman  
facing dubious weeks

in the morning, maintenance,  
taking one multivitamin, two calcium, three vitamin  
C’s

in a month, I receive  
my numbers and a paragraph explaining

“your verbal scores were higher than your math scores;  
therefore, your verbal ability  
is better than your math ability.”

### 3. Words

when he speaks he keeps  
his hand at his face constantly  
covering his quivering  
cheek

a tourniquet, perhaps,  
dealing in wounds, in words,  
writing

wrong courageous drunk  
and *Andover*                      *small engine*, naming  
everything  
if only as a way to call it back:

it was the voice speaking “leave,”  
that left me looking  
for something to say, for anything  
I could save.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Phillips I

---

This place is made out of boys.  
The ground has teeth. The boulders  
have veins. The birch trees have skin  
flaking off.

The dead here smell crisp, fresh, and wintery.  
Three years, this fact foxed me. I thought  
that this place had no ghosts,  
was all.

Andover smiles in snow-melt crescents.  
It's hungry yet.

*Amy O'Neal*



*Susannah Parker*

# men and salt

---

a tortoise shell is dry leather  
and I am, one  
for, the,  
oceans are salt at my lips and things.

and shells are dry and salt  
so i must beone. i must be one  
i knew it through the grains,  
as the calm of it all can testify  
to the calm of it all,

dry and salt and leather  
I must be one(i must b 1)

the birds just wail sometimes, and  
I too,  
have wailed like birds- for they  
tell me all men are shells  
of men and salt

You could string them up with twine  
to form a natural Bridge of sorts.  
if not to dance across the sea,  
on dry and leather shells.

*Erik Junbacker*

# In My Wake

---

Does your ranting  
Pounding  
On doors, beds  
But mostly against your own limits  
Remind you of anything-  
Anyone?

I walked ahead of you  
Images of me still do-  
Also stand behind you  
(goads, prods, heavy boots)  
Knocking you down  
Urging you on at the same time-  
This situation is becoming  
A cruel pincer.

You obsess  
The strain chokes you.  
Moving forward  
A car in neutral  
Down the driveway-  
No driver.

Though I hate admitting it  
You are becoming  
More and more like me.  
Given the choice  
I wouldn't take your position  
In my wake-  
I doubt I could survive in it.

*Nathan Littlefield*

# “louder still...”

---

louder still  
than a piercing  
ricochet.

needle rain  
sewing up cracks  
in the roof.

*Hillary Dresser*

# true theme

---

i daydream in blueprint.  
and sometimes,  
just sometimes.  
all those lines can cut me.  
into a thousand starched-white  
walkers.  
uniforms of the walkers and the walkers themselves.  
landscaped, cross-sectioned, and  
the geometric absolute.  
I have grown to admire in starched-white  
to lose true theme  
in subtle reflective quality.  
and bounce back into blue

*Erik Jungbacker*

# Cool Faded Automobiles

---

For all the efforts god  
youth runs a dry riverbed  
at the prick of day.  
one hour elapses into  
the beautiful things,  
that are not mouths, a canyon.  
of words and compliments.  
the same as the cool fading  
automobiles. a case of beer.  
I walked around in rubber shoes,  
meeting the cracked clay  
with a cracked smile and cracked shells.  
and cracked friends with cracked smiles.  
(you know the pattern they make  
is a street scene of sorts.)  
each avenue busy with buying and selling.  
...wearing things unto the day.  
like dirt into the carpeting  
through and through.

*Erik Jungbacker*

# The Auto and its Consequence

You feel the beast squirm  
its mass through snow  
and like a dream you let it go  
and like your childhood tree you hold it  
hold it in your palms so plump and pained  
The lights cut fog and  
the world is smoke-  
exhalations from the bruised concrete,  
steam from the hot yellow streaks  
smeared between the trees.  
The world is smoke  
and you stare hard at the  
devilish red pairs  
you stare hard at angelic eyes.  
The dent in the passenger side  
hurts your kidneys when you see it  
The drool down the windows  
you swear corrodes your shirt  
the high hard hills hurt

There's a new gas station in Cross Village  
where before was tawny space  
beside a general store and church  
There's a view from Angel Hill Farm  
where there are culdesacs cut into the field  
grey snakes in wait to mate with wheels

To hit the suburbs is to die  
to suffocate in your auto  
to scoot between strip malls  
to charge a gauntlet of cheap culture  
you start and skid and stop and park  
and spit, restart, cough back on the freeway-  
And you're conquered

you're stuck in a cancerous intestine  
ten feet from you in four directions  
are hot souls coughing  
between you there is plastic,  
leather, metal, glass and  
dead air

The midwestern grey sky  
humps the bleak stone road

They're setting up orange spikes  
and puking up cement,  
igniting fiery signs and white lines  
They take a giant waffle iron  
and burn a grid into the sand  
They're building huts and malls and lots  
They're building a giant pole barn  
A world built for autos  
A landscape of neon shoebox toilets

We need a bubble around our hearts  
and our bodies aren't big enough  
We need fiery red engines  
puffing, pushing us and our metal cells  
We need to cover every inch of breathing earth  
We need to move

*Will Glass*

was it the question of  
the clean and the dirty...  
and the way some puddles  
can just bend you into perfection.

your image is nothing but  
factory birds.

but yes, I'd say clean is the way to go.  
most people are infected with the thing .  
everything is how it should,  
even the sot on walls is not sot  
but an age of sorts.  
and passing these rites through the  
crowds is more than just the runaway thing.  
it clots inside everyone and clots and clots.  
in a room reserved for architecture.  
the awful violin was shrill,  
and a turk.  
so we had to leave, we had to leave  
over all the frozen puddles.  
gliding through the mirrors.

*Erik Jungbacker*



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**Verging**  
**A Collection of Poetry**  
*By Caroline Whitbeck*



A Courant Chapbook  
Edited by Caitlin Berrigan and Mary Ziegler



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This chapbook is a cousin of Phillips Academy's literary magazine 'Courant.' Each chapbook is a collection of the works of a single person who has distinguished him or herself in 'The Courant.' The editors have chosen among the writer's published and previously unpublished pieces and arranged them in such a way that the artist's writing can be seen as a whole composition, as a body.

Cover art:

'Four Walls'

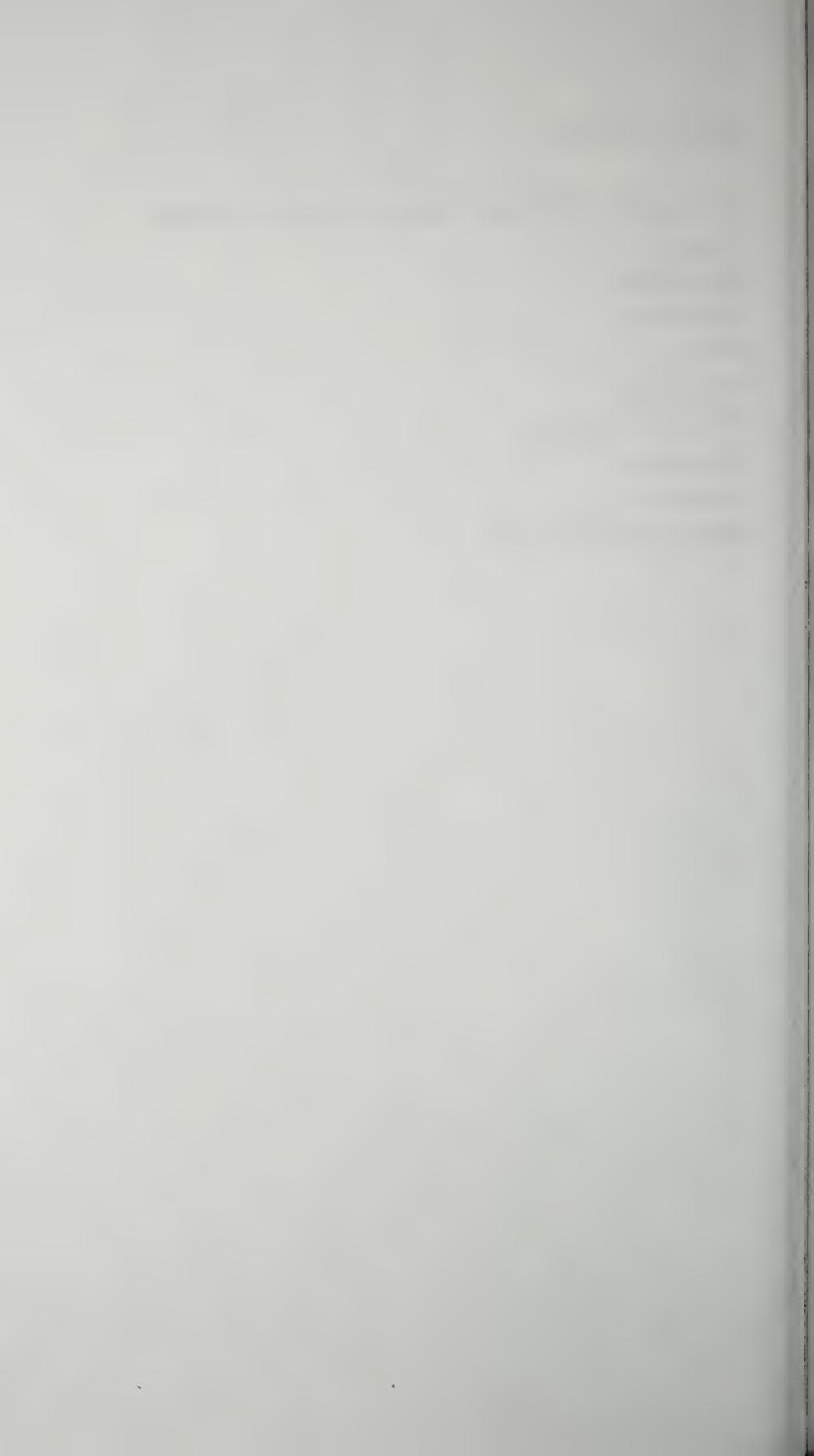
Gelatin silver-print by Caroline Whitbeck

This book is dedicated to my  
grandmother, Helen Oechler.



## Table of Contents

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- Fallout, Shelter, Suture



## roduction

Mary Ziegler

Caroline Whitbeck is almost a seamstress, weaving together her experiences and the experiences of someone each of us knows—or could be ourselves—to form a fabric that is undeniably human. When I read Caroline's poetry, there are times when I stop reading, silent and wonder at how her words could have exposed an emotion I had felt opening the door to her own experiences just enough for me to see some of my own experiences in them. Her poetry can be artfully quiet, inviting you to exhale and respond to each image, or it can be raw and undeniable, leading a breathless reader from image to image until, it reaches an unforgettable conclusion, leaving the reader unable to wake from the ideas of the poem for a time.

Caroline can mock her subject, as she does in 'Poem,' or lend a sympathetic to what is being said. In fact, as I finished her poems, it was quiet exhaustion at having seen such a display of her range of being and expression. Her chapbook is titled *Verging*, and there is no doubt in my mind as a writer or as a person that she is an unforgettable writer, still verging on becoming greater than she was before.

## Introduction

by Caitlin Berrigan

Caroline Whitbeck is the Mother Theresa of wit. There is no limit to her brilliant, bruised axioms and the striking metaphor she nonchalantly dusts into casual conversation. Sometimes I wish I could have a miniature Caroline I could take with me anywhere and play when I wanted a banquet of wry whimsy to make my literary stomach swell. But the closest we can get to distilling Caroline is through a collection of her poetry; to take just a couple of smoothed tiles from a titanic mosaic.

Each poem Caroline writes is like a grenade of insight, a surprise explosion, a popcorn popper of lyricism. Listening to or reading one of her poems leaves shrapnel in your heart. Caroline says she wants a reaction from her poetry. She wants her poems to make you say, “I know that story too.” And no matter how many times that story has appeared, dressed in different suits in her life—in all of our lives, Caroline is able to boldly and acutely extract the marrow to a eloquent, marvelously simple, and sometimes acerbic form we do not always see ourselves. By writing primarily autobiographically in this way, Caroline has made herself a sage with an extraordinarily expressive tongue, and the power to send goose bumps up our limbs and bring epiphanies in our brains.

Her use of rhythm, visual space, and emphasis on specific words or phrases is vital to the poem. Each piece is crafted meticulously until it combusts with the spontaneity and rawness with which it was written. Her repetition of sounds and phrases can pull us into a cycle-like meditation. Her repetition of Astrid in ‘Poem’ puts a floor to the piece, giving it solidifies the woman’s symbolism. Similarly, “...because I am done/ I am done, I am done, I am done,/ I am done with it” in ‘I am done’ winds us down with an iron fist that no single statement can achieve with the same vigor and pulse. The sound of “the sun, the moon, and so on...” in ‘Fallout, Shelter, Suture’ dizzies and intoxicates us, turning us around to meet the ending with weaker defenses. A consistent sound and effect is given in ‘Poem’: “...tales of the menus/ tales of the men...” almost extending the image of “menus of men,” while remaining faithful to each subject and meaning.

Her images are keenly defined, prismatic, and often surreal connections you can almost run your hands over. "Your mother, leaning your life like a cat" and "...the commuter rail/ rattles you gray/ as a in 'Four Walls' and "Astrid w/ red begonias" in 'Poem' are such sive images. "...A hat rack gliding through the air..." in 'Verging' is the brink of absurdity with its surrealistic humour, but makes its nt in a surprisingly poignant way. And there is no end to her simple, etal lines that hold truth as strong as gospel, as in 'Fallout, Shelter, ure': "...thread is/ stronger/ than both of us."

I have deliberately avoided describing Caroline Whitbeck's work fusion of famous poets' styles because her fashion of creation would be limited; like trying to describe what an American looks like in adjectives. Each poem is like "a flare! a flash! / each a greater blast the last."

# Verging

---

my passage

is that of a hat rack  
gliding through the air

that somehow hopes  
to go unnoticed.

# Four Walls

---

1. I'm sick of searching  
for what you've lost

always finding it  
in the

"goddamn! breadbox!"

voices echo in the kitchen  
clash in static  
the radio mutters  
in distraction

coming home  
the commuter rail  
rattles you gray  
as a fist.

2. you think of  
paper  
envy it's smooth brow  
white as the sky, but  
windless

you want to write a list  
of your grievances:

your mother, leaning into your life like a cat  
your daughter, behind closed doors  
your husband, forgets  
your father, a void

the sign in Trenton that said "the world takes."

3. turn on the faucet and  
the pipes ring and knock  
throughout the house like  
a blind pinball machine:

he kicks you in his sleep.

rhinoceroid, cyclopic, lopsided  
stumbling forward  
all thumbs  
your body turns  
against you

you still have the scar  
he still "finds you attractive."

and standing  
at the bedposts  
in your housecoat, you

want to kick too

scald and blister  
rush,  
still red:

demanding to know why you  
were the one  
standing at the sink

when the water  
spurted out too  
hot and too  
fast.

# Education

---

## 1. Love

it was the year we first learned  
to spell “beautiful”, falling down

in the chase, lips smacking  
on the ground in a kiss tight  
as mother’s purse clasp

on the bus with a tooth-shattered face  
she says: “does it hurt?”

I say: “it has heat; it comes and goes.”  
she says: “in pangs?”

“in *pangs*.”

## 2. Math

eighteen and one glass of wine  
at six in the evening over the stove fixing  
minute rice for one woman  
facing dubious weeks

in the morning, maintenance,  
taking one multivitamin, two calcium, three vitamin C’s

in a month, I receive  
my numbers and a paragraph explaining

“your verbal scores were higher than your math scores;  
therefore, your verbal ability  
is better than your math ability.”

### 3. Words

when he speaks he keeps  
his hand at his face constantly  
covering his quivering  
cheek

a tourniquet, perhaps,  
dealing in wounds, in words,  
writing

*wrong courageous drunk*  
and *Andover*                    *small engine*, naming everythin  
if only as a way to call it back:

it was the voice speaking “leave,”  
that left me looking  
for something to say, for anything  
I could save.

# Poem

---

50 cents,

you write about Astrid  
you, gray  
in your robe, blue  
you write about Astrid

or a cat's tail, anything  
over newsprint and toast crumbs

smug in your  
breakfasty nook you  
write about Astrid in the  
cosmos, the coffee cup

yes, you are aging and  
Astrid is  
red-lipped and

you are writing to Astrid  
for Astrid has  
hatboxes  
stuffed with old  
paper,  
old closets and

windowboxes: "Astrid  
w/ red begonias."

Astrid  
smoldering in  
your garage with  
black and chrome  
cars

"O Astrid"  
cooks a brown egg  
lacquers her fingernails  
lives in New York  
as do you

Astrid,  
tales of the menus  
tales of the men and  
of the grease

(All of Astrid's  
friends are Franks  
and Jacks, they wear  
blue pants, send  
postcards)

you wonder at  
Astrid, at  
cherrystones,  
the insides of her  
mouth,

at skeins of red wool  
at her stocking-clad  
legs

(her calves pumping  
blood and heels:  
brackish, seaworthy legs)

smoking  
cigarettes in fast cars  
cigarettes at the breakfast table

mannequin, Astrid  
muse, Astrid:  
a plastic brow  
that learned to sweat

and you  
those tremored hands  
“O the vein  
and liver-spotted!”  
and

fruit heavy as  
plums, that dusky  
rot and bruising skin  
bruising in, you  
that sweat and age  
all flannel-kneed  
pajamas,  
grasping brown life  
from every gray hair:

longing at last  
for the red  
ripe lips

for a kiss.

# With and Without

---

one left me without words

two pupils staring back  
shouting against another's face

rehearsed  
I strike out, hip slung  
poses of anger and love  
catch my hands up in my skirt

I touched him once, twice—  
and reaching for what...

those things slight, the patience

of religion, of a river  
above or below skin, yes, in search  
of its source

without love, this one  
is used to the weight of my arm  
he turns for me as he must  
as it is written

one left me without words  
carrying his mouth away from mine

(it was the clock blinking innocently  
in all that is past

it was the phone call and  
the buzzing along the line  
that came in between...)

it is a brutal thing, the space  
where anything once was

voiceless, innumerable, waking

into a new,  
unfamiliar room, not knowing  
the shape of the furniture or  
where the windows are

waking you  
with light you are not accustomed to

# Possession

---

It wasn't mine so I gave it to you  
you can do what you want with it, you, it  
wasn't mine, I gave it to you, to you

comes by then sometimes at night  
or calls, brings the construction crews  
and promises, he says he needs measurements, he  
opens my shirt, the cabinets, saying  
different now, picture this in blue,  
and we do it on the floorboards

It wasn't mine but she took it home and unwrapped  
it, left it on her bathroom ledge, filled the whole  
thing with steam while she soaked and outside New  
York was newsprint and didn't smell like roses, but she  
did, so I gave it to her, to her, it wasn't mine, it wasn't

comes back with shoes that talk HA HA  
across the floor at me pulling up the boards  
and when I wake I see he has exposed  
the moldings, mouldering, my left breast  
and there's a man I dunno with a drill on  
my back stroking fluid in again and calling me  
“honey” (as if he didn't know my name...)

I said it wasn't mine but the police didn't believe it,  
all written up in the newspapers, and they brought  
dogs and a stumped lady with the search warrant to knock  
my bathroom door, but no, I'm soaking with  
the roses, leaving for New York, and she dunno where  
I've left the toenail polish, but I won't let her  
touch it, she rots, she tells them it was mine, and they  
believe her, bring dogs, dogs into the house, I want to kick  
her out, out the dog door, but we don't have one, we don'

tries to apologize, he brings bandages  
and a pair of pliers, printing embalmed footsteps  
(no shoes! HA HA!) across my floor (all  
gone! HA HA!) where I am standing on nothing now,  
there's nothing now, and I would  
say "bleeding quietly" the way they always say  
about fish (is it?) and other dumb animals, and  
he is rubbing my back with something, but that  
must not be good for my skin (no...no) see, that's  
not my skin anymore, see, I have become  
something entirely different, become something,  
become something entirely different  
than when you began me

When you find it, please pick it up, because  
someone must have lost it, must  
wonder where it is, want it back (maybe), just  
don't give it to me, I don't want it and it  
really isn't mine, I promise, and besides  
it cries at night, wants me to rub its back  
and give it hugs and love and care about its  
feelings and its health and no I can't stand it, I  
simply can't stand it, I hate it, I threw it  
out into the street, and it's yours now, if  
you want it, and you must, you must have it, must  
take it, see, take it with you, because I am done, see  
I am done, I am done, I am done,  
I am done with it.

# Fallout, Shelter, Suture

---

1. “chernobyl?”  
“no, chamomile.”
2. he says: “honey, I’m breaking boundaries.”  
he says: “honey, I’m at the window.”

(beat)

“are you there?” he said  
“where?” I said  
“the bottom of the fishbowl?” he said  
“there’s nothing.”

touching me now  
fingertips  
fishy-mouthed

(beat)

“bend for me.”  
“I do not bend.”  
I do not bend

restless, indifferent  
stiff as trees

toes,  
interlocking branches  
but

splinterless

I do not split

I do not bend

branches bend  
but

glass

breaks.

3. you  
wash, wrists  
at the sink  
slip in the water  
clean the wound

glass is  
clear as water and  
cool to  
the touch  
as white linen  
gloves, gauze.

(beat)

“I do not bend; I break.”  
“splinters? splashes.”

I’m at the window-  
-pane,  
glass gone  
nothing

but wood  
remains.

4. “kisses? what of care and kindness?”  
he is cut, wet red  
I cannot stand this mess

thread is  
stronger

than both of us.

(beat)

I sew,  
his hand in mine, a vow.

the stitch,  
the wound is  
warm to the touch—

touching him.

(beat)

a domestic  
clutter in the kitchen  
a dish, rag  
a curtain

I steep, I sip  
old tea, old  
roots,

growing towards  
the light:

the kitchen fluorescent,  
the sun, the son,  
and so on:

(beat)

a flare! a flash!

each a greater blast  
than the last.



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Caroline Whitbeck

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# The Courant



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# Introduction: English is Patient

In The Courant, one finds many ways to say a thing. Consider a man in his garden in Matt O'Brien's "...We must go and work in the garden...":

*A spectacled gardener  
clad in proletarian blue  
digs in the darkness  
hands worn by the burden of  
lost opulence.  
His weary eyes,  
accustomed to the night,  
long not for vanished glories.  
Only the flowers await  
the splendor of sunset  
that knowing ex-emperors  
can call revenge.*

Or Anthony Morales' man in a garden:

*The brown soul of the island  
slaves en el campo  
day after day  
sunrise to sunset  
he tends to the field  
making it his life  
His pain is shown  
by the 9 platano fingers  
of his soft rock hands  
and the rivers  
carved along his face  
providing channels  
for the bodies of sweat  
He never washes away  
the stain and the pain  
of the past 506 years  
on his sparse attire  
trigueno skin and tattered soul*

There are different ways to say "Andover" in The Courant. This is what Amy O'Neal says in "Phillips I":

*This place is made out of boys.  
The ground has teeth. The boulders  
have veins. The birch trees have skin  
flaking off.*

*The dead here smell crisp, fresh, and wintery.  
Three years, this fact foxed me. I thought  
that this place had no ghosts,  
was all.*

*Andover smiles in snow-melt crescents.  
It's hungry yet.*

Caroline Whitbeck says "Andover" differently in the third section of her poem "Education," entitled *Words*:

*when he speaks he keeps  
his hand at his face constantly  
covering his quivering  
cheek*

*a tourniquet, perhaps,  
dealing in wounds, in words,  
writing*

*wrong courageous drunk  
and Andover small engine, naming  
everything  
if only as a way to call it back:*

*it was the voice speaking "leave,"  
that left me looking  
for something to say, for anything  
I could save.*

In O'Neal's poem, there are at least three levels of language that come from somewhere beyond the confines of the printed word on the page. What does it mean to be foxed by fact? There is an idea here. And what is a snow-melt crescent? There is an image there. Is the fox an emblem of the place as a boy who steals stealthily? Is the crescent an image of those lips of snow bending over the tops of buildings like white tongues? And when we hear "was all," is that the voice of a young girl apologizing for not knowing better? Is any of this right and does it really matter if one thoroughly enjoys the simple event of something said in an utterly original way? In Mo-

rales' poem, there are levels of language too. There is a story beyond the fact of the print on the page. The man might be the land itself. He may be working that land as that work works him. And then there is the excitement of another language altogether in the poem that invites the reader because there is enough elsewhere to tease us into translations literal. What is el campo? It turns up in another poem by Morales in The Courant:

*Tu sabe quien es Albizu Campo...Libertad o Muerte...*  
*America es un grupo*  
*de maricones... Viva Puerto Rico y la revolucion*  
*It shakes Ant because*  
*finally the truth had been told*

In "Searching for What Was in My Face," Morales follows Ant as he "hunts for his prey/an idea for the poem." Reading "Don Jibaro" first helps us to understand what it might mean to search for something that is in your own face. In effect, Morales' poetry comes from a source that lies in a world of experience, not borrowed references. There is a whole world of language in his heart. We're seeing a little part of it. In some sense "Searching" is a statement about what is poetry, what is poetic language. After hearing the truth, Ant walks right past what for many fine young poets and fiction writers in The Courant would have been material for poetry:

*He makes his way up the stairs  
and doesn't stop to notice the customaries  
the hieroglyphics on the wall  
the pile of baby ca ca on the 2nd floor  
the young couple that makes out on the 5th floor  
(he heard that she's due soon)  
the burnt hallway of the 6th floor  
and now finally the sweet smell of the rice and peas  
quietly sitting in the pot  
Abuelita greets him at the door  
and the journey is over for the idea  
The poem wrote itself*

Morales defines for himself a rigorous discipline. Ant walks through a pretty tough world to get to the sweet smell of peas and rice. Indeed, he passes our Jibaro:

*Where are the gardens of John Adams  
He reaches abuelita's projects  
for his arroz con gandules*

*In the lobby  
the jibaro's eyes call him  
to hear his lamentos  
His eyes contained the sadness  
of a whipped dog and  
his wrinkled skin and thick fingers  
revealed many days en el campo*

So we know Ant will return to Jibaro later, as he will no doubt to other events he has to listen to and witness on the way to walking out this poem. Interestingly, it is a smell that evokes the idea that becomes this poem, a sweet smell that represents a stable force in the “projects” that “gardens” have become. In “Searching,” then, Ant maps out the very, very difficult terrain that defines what will be a complex field of vision, the music of salsa and meringue overwhelmed by the “quiet hustler’s piece/that Big Willies kick in a fiend’s ear”:

*What’chu want kid?  
Blue caps red caps  
Just as solid as my naps  
Nickel dime  
Guaranteed to fuck you up in time  
Snow blow  
What you wanna know  
Yeah I got some crack  
5-0 coming betta watch yo’back*

The brilliance of Morales’ original vision is that he *hears* all and *sees* all even as Ant feels compelled to resist so much. As difficult as the quest is, Ant is making it because Morales’ controls half a dozen languages here: Spanish, what we call proper English, the tempting music of street corners, the formality of poetic conventions, plain peech, and an over-arching historical voice that commands all, even counsels the poet in the end. In other words, Morales speaks as a poet. He represents the particular inventiveness of Volume V, Number 1.

Zach Waldman and Willie Glass are explicitly concerned with language as music, a subject in and of itself. In “Microwave dinner for the cold black sinner...,” Waldman rattles off a long list of broken-up phrases:

*microwave dinner for the cold black sinner  
and the dress is worn, my legs not warm*

*styrofoam box on the greengrass lawn  
hepcat dawn and my mind is gone  
and help the poor boy who's lost his shoes  
help that urchin sing his blues*

*the big dog cries cause his master died  
save the baby, the gorilla cried*

*"It wasn't the smart slang of today's youth, but the polite  
family talk of my childhood."*

This is language as cut-up in the spirit of Burroughs and Ferlinghetti. It is a vision of normal family life as shattered crystal vase on the nice hardwood floor. Willie finds another way to bend language in "Listening to the Music I've Made":

*Well I'm hearing myself think-  
and describing it in verse  
is like trying to make your  
children breed  
It's like tattooing a supple  
heart on your own forehead-  
the perversity kills me*

I think I know what occasions this poem. Willie and others tape their performance during the battle of the bands. I don't think that listening to it was a life-changing experience for Willie since he is always making music. His bongos are next to his bed, his stereo above his head, and his roommate is Domenic Cimino. And this poem doesn't attempt a dramatic expository point about listening to your own music. Rather, it is simply his wrestling his relationship to music into language and in that effort finding meaning much like Ant's walk through troubling music to a sweet smell.

The re-incarnation of language is not confined to poetry in The Courant. Listen to Mary Ziegler's description of a boy at the base of a ladder:

*She opened her eyes just in time to make it down the rusty ladder and there in a heap at the bottom was a boy. His knees were praying with the ladder rail and had the most admirable grass stains she'd ever seen. His head was in his hands, and all she could see were the beams of hair coming through his fingers. She reached for his hand to see his eyes.*

Read the rest of the story and the layers of language here make a ladder all their own because you figure out definitions in a glossary of shifting words. Ziegler has three stories in The Courant. The reader sees pretty quickly that they are figures on a theme.

Kate Zangrilli plunges you headlong into the weird language of Ruth who speaks in brown rivers and wheat:

*The dead fish frothed at the lips, saying in the house of man, in the house of man. I followed the origin of their sounds: his words rough-edged and homespun, bred on buttermilk, then her honey-song: the shovel-nosed woman must have had a magpie in her chest. From the bathroom, a leap-to, up-running scream shattered: smoke on the water. I banged to the floorboards, through the open door seeing her head growing out of Theo's back below his ear.*

This is a story about a woman who comes to see her dying mother and contends with all kinds of ghosts in the house. It is stream-of-consciousness narrative that demands a near complete surrender on the part of the reader. The language is so deep in itself as to frighten even those who speak it. In fact, the language has more life than the people who tussle with it as best they can. Writing helps us write; speaking helps us speak. Both help us see anew.

And so in “Cool Faded Automobiles,” Erik Jungbacker finds a way to see a car:

*For all the efforts god  
youth runs a dry riverbed  
at the prick of day.  
one hour elapses into  
the beautiful things,  
that are not mouths, a canyon.  
of words and compliments.  
the same as the cool fading  
automobiles. a case of beer.*

The “wearing things unto the day” that Jungbacker describes informs his aggressive artistry, the jarring punctuation the direct assault on words that issue from a notion of time that seems to wear beautiful things down, the surfaces man and god make.

And Willie Glass finds another way to see a car, as a vehicle or a more explicit kind of wearing down:

*They're setting up orange spikes  
and puking up cement,  
igniting fiery signs and white lines  
They take a giant waffle iron  
and burn a grid into the sand  
They're building huts and malls and lots  
They're building a giant pole barn  
A world built for autos  
A landscape of neon shoebox toilets*

*We need a bubble around our hearts  
and our bodies aren't big enough  
We need fiery red engines  
puffing, pushing us and our metal cells  
We need to cover every inch of breathing earth  
We need to move*

The car as beast that propels us into a suburbanized wasteland populated by strip malls and “cul de sacs cut into the field/grey snakes in wait to mate with wheels” insidiously becomes our second skin, our “metal cells.”

Language, then, discovers meaning, bends to it, invents it as it names it, and in The Courant eats itself up in a frenzy of allusion and counter-allusion as in Caroline Whitbeck’s “Love in a Panic” or Charlie Finch’s “The Remains.” One poem is as high-wired as Anne Sexton. The other as urbane as James Merrill. They’re both love poems. Whitbeck’s love takes this shape in language:

*and when you sprayed to a stop,  
I had to coop and kiss  
all your darkened underclothes,  
that beat breast warmth  
of pectorals where once we kept a keel and flew  
or a great slippery heart like a peach pit*

*so dark, dank and dark, rank  
armpitted the lost salt where the sea  
goes to break or to die, intertidal  
with a crab or a scallop lopped upon the crag rocks—  
nipple rooks, two crows who stoop and stare—beady  
toweling then after his breath  
the lace it pulls, the sprays of old flowers*

*it puffs and doilies in the air—an old lady's  
bedroom Jesus dust ruffle*

The ocean churns through this language like an awesome and awe-inspiring life force that the speaker resists and studies as the actual subject emerges from it, a boy, and the real subject emerges from him, "a tight gape like a star,/a pull or a pole hotwired like a tree or a lamppost."

Finch's love takes this shape in language after acknowledging an elusive consummation, romanticism in a modernist's guise. He settles (as he always does) into a confession:

*This is what we come to, in the end.  
Disjoined A's and H's. Correspondence  
without correspondent, iron without ochroid,  
summer without lightning, 13th without December.  
I will be happy with reciprocity.  
The woods are lovely-dark and deep-  
indeed, paradigm of common experience.*

*The adumbration of the lights at Christmas,  
a glittering necklace, the glittering prizes, not  
that Rafael had intended. Finally, her  
they lie, the remains of the old life, the  
other world, where it was you and I and  
Rostropovich and that, as you said was art-  
why didn't I quit but again, there we were  
a row of nickels, Duffell, Veyne, Lowell,  
Hopkins, Lowell, Forster, Wodehouse, Austen,  
the swirling winds, swirling sounds.  
I never thought I could be as strong as this.  
It is all for you. These rocks, waters, seas.  
Again, finally, always, we lie, in last sun,  
immortal, for the final arrival, and our knuckles white.  
A line of our own, piercing  
Florence, a dream of patterns  
across the sky again for you, one more time for you.*

Finch allies himself with poets because their words are the companions with which he will find correspondence in lieu of the you who can never be fully manifest in an Other. For this speaker, language is an adumbration of lights at Christmas, but it is also the lover whose words can put out grass and flowers "despite the falling snow." His recognition of language as "piercing Florence," in effect briefly

having at the old world, Finch is like the poet of a “Double Drear of Spring,” John Ashberry. That poet tells us that language is all the invention we’ll have in this life.

And what do Jibaro’s words mean in the lobby of the project? What is the literal translation? Well, look it up, but remember that language is fluid in Morales’ invention and the truth may not be just in the words themselves. The Smitty Prize goes to Anthony Morales for his poem “Searching for What Was In My Face.”

*Craig Thorn*

# Searching for What Was In My Face

The writer hunts for his prey  
an idea for the poem  
Frustrated with writer's block  
Ant-boogie hits the streets  
searching for a thought

He walks through  
the concrete suburb  
and first comes to a bodega  
the center of many previous ideas  
Maybe an ice cold Malta will be the remedy  
Ant goes to the back of the bodega  
peruses the Alpo and Goya product  
aisle to find his salvation  
but when he cracks open the chest  
he discovers no Malta Goya or Vitarroz  
that would stimulate his mind

Even more frustrated  
he starts to walk  
forever it seems  
towards his abuelita's house  
which is in C&C territory  
On his way  
he passes by similar street corners  
and hears la musica del Bronx  
lively salsa and merengue beats  
being blasted from La Mega  
mixed with the hardest hip-hop from  
Hot 97  
fused with the classic soul of Kiss  
All of which can't compete  
with a quiet hustler's piece  
that Big Willies kick in a fiend's ear

on every corner  
What'chu want kid?  
Blue caps red caps  
Just as solid as my naps  
Nickel dime  
Guaranteed to fuck you up in time  
Snow blow  
What you wanna know  
Yeah I got some crack  
5-0 coming betta watch yo'back

All Ant wants is his abuelita's  
arroz con gandules for his idea  
not these hoes  
disadvantaged youth  
offering things that even  
Big Ant wants to reject  
for prices he can't refuse  
He recognizes the stringy one  
in the pom-pom shorts  
and dirty halter top  
She was in his homeroom  
Her eyes carry a lot of luggage  
and many tear riddened nights  
Danm Ant says  
as he hears the rattle of the #2 train above him

Where are the gardens of John Adams  
He reaches abuelita's projects  
for his arroz con gandules  
In the lobby  
the jibaro's eyes call him  
to hear his lamentos  
His eyes contained the sadness  
of a whipped dog and  
his wrinkled skin and thick fingers  
revealed many days en el campo

Jibaro grumbles some Spanish  
unknown to Ant

Tu sabe quien es Albizu Campo... Libertad o Muerte...  
America es un grupo  
de maricones... Viva Puerto Rico y la revolucion  
It shakes Ant because  
finally the truth had been told

He makes his way up the stairs  
and doesn't stop to notice the customaries  
the hieroglyphics on the wall  
the pile of baby ca ca on the 2nd floor  
the young couple that makes out on the 5th floor  
(he heard that she's due soon)  
the burnt hallway of the 6th floor  
and now finally the sweet smell of the rice and peas  
quietly sitting in the pot  
Abuelita greets him at the door  
and the journey is over for the idea  
The poem wrote itself

*Anthony Morales*



*Ariel Lambe*

## Elegy to Allen Ginsberg

Caitlin Berrigan



*Sarah Josselyn*

# Shadow Sequestration

---

they tell me  
as if  
all plains must be windswept  
as if  
from dawn to dusk  
the sedges, millets, oats, and reeds  
sway and sing  
on the open prairie  
as far as the eye can see.

How sweet.

But on my plane  
in the third dimension  
the grass seems silent  
if not  
dead and dry  
while I cannot see  
the mountains or lakes  
only an oppressive sun  
(the rest blocked out  
by looming canyon walls)

I heard the shadows singing:

Sculpted sentries  
made from the mix  
of sun and canyon on the scorched earth,  
imagined guards  
of self-made prisons  
holding the followers of ancient ideals.

and then he asked,  
what happened next?

I said,  
we sang *la Marseillaise*  
and heard  
so many French words  
bouncing off cliffsides  
we mistook it for a revolution.

but then

I saw the mailman coming  
with the tabloids  
and a letter from my wife  
I saw the county mayor and the county coroner  
walking to the county farm  
I saw Einstein chanting an incantation  
“I saw the best minds of my generation...”<sup>1</sup>  
I saw friends, Romans, countrymen,  
uncles, dancers, the FBI,  
I saw neighbors, Martians, the IRS,  
they brought manifestos  
and fresh-grown tomatoes.

He said,  
you are the victim  
of a shadow sequestration  
or  
you are the harbinger  
of the Earth’s resuscitation,  
here,  
take these pills  
and get some sleep.

*Matt O’Brien*

<sup>1</sup> from Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*

# Requiem Imagery

---

folks / am tired / of this / so will soon stop  
but first must note  
that midmorning but lamplit blue  
sun  
—would take mineral books, books of gems  
to find a blue like that —  
—a chemical blue like that—  
would take

a debate to drive to number-lust  
twenty-six volts and a bottle of gin  
a cranial blast  
space  
tired of the chalk dust sunstreams  
which congeal the same  
whether they congeal or not  
on brick wall or not  
more on ice or not

Alphabetical faith  
would resolve the debate  
of the texture of the sun.

*Kate Zangrilli*

# Comissioned

---

Belly deep,  
*plumb across*

is the best poem ever written  
about rising flood waters;  
commissioned by a third-grade teacher  
in Pontotoc, Mississippi, in the 1940s  
from, among others,  
a new boy who was slow

The poet was taken out and whipped

*Amy O'Neil*

# We Defy Augury

Dearest Nicholas,

I love you, I deeply, passionately, uncontrollably love you. I love you so much. You are the recurring theme of my life. Again and again I see you in my mind, I hear your voice. It's affecting my studies somewhat. Did I mention that I love you?

Hey Nick!

I know it's only been about three days since I saw you last but I just thought I'd drop you a line to see how things were going. Nothing much is up here—I just came across a note of yours and decided I'd say hi. Hi. How's the weather down in I love you?

Oops, Freudian slip. Like that joke where a woman goes to her psychiatrist and says,

"Doc, I just made the biggest Freudian slip—I wanted to ask my mother to pass the salt but instead I said, 'You dumb bitch, you ruined my life.'"

Well, I thought it was funny.

Nick,

You dumb bastard, you ruined my life.

OK, Nick,

So when you said "I was looking for you at the dance," and ou were looking at me, did you mean that you were looking for me t the dance or for the other people in the room, like maybe that heap bitch Jenem, Je n'aime, (when she introduced herself I said pas" and she said what? And I said forget it) the one with the really short skirt, or was it directed towards me? Because I would like to think that it was to me, but I don't want to flatter myself, because m sure you could get any girl you wanted, you being perfect and l. But is there a chance you were talking to me? That you had anted to see me?

lick,

If I had been at the dance would you have danced with me? Would anything have happened? I was in there for a little while, but it was bad 80's pop and I couldn't deal with all the groping and hormones. I guess I'll never know.

I could have gotten someone that night, if that were what I had wanted. But I didn't want to dance with some random randy guy. I knew that if you liked me at all it was for more than just looks, well, obviously, since I don't have any. You know what I mean. We just had such great conversations, about Chinese war treatises and obfuscation and shari'a. How romantic. Geek love. For every boy geek there's a girl geek. El Geeko. But you weren't a geek—like when Brian threw that wad of paper at you while you were talking and you swatted it out of the air with your pen without even pausing or looking at it. Or that really darling garnet tie that looked so crisp against your white shirt and navy blazer. Impeccable. When I looked at our reflections in the window my face overlapped yours, and the edges blurred.

Dear Nick,

I'm not usually this obsessive. It's just that everyone I have liked before you had been a "Yes, but...." There was always some complaint. He's too short. He's not intelligent. That one's not interested, and that one talks to imaginary friends. If only he were more intense, if only he were kinder.... You shattered the *but's* and *if only's*.

Nick,

I kept the tea bag from lunch at Capitol Grounds Coffee—the cinnamon and star anise one you said you liked the smell of. I couldn't believe it when you came over and talked to me. I wondered if the herbs from my herb vinaigrette were perched jauntily between my teeth. I was about to ask you to join us, but then I saw that you were with Kevin and Dave. And I was already eating with Jess—I have always sworn that I will never blow off a friend for a guy. So I laughed and nodded and wondered what to say, and ate my salad like a demented rabbit between the *Seventeen*-prescribed extended glances and half smiles. I probably looked like I had indi-

gestion. You kept on looking at me. Maybe I did have food between my teeth.. I should have asked you to join us and avoided the humiliation of that other lunch invitation.

Dear Nick,

Has anyone ever told you what a wonderful voice you have?

Dear Nick,

I'm really sorry about waking you up that day. You told me to call you at noon, but I still feel guilty for waking you up. None of us had gotten any sleep that night, I know. I knew you wouldn't have wanted to go to lunch with me anyway. You asked me if I'd still be there for the meeting at two. Of course, I said. If you hadn't had that other meeting would you have gone with me? Be honest.

Nick,

I don't know what's wrong with me. I've never been like this before. I've never been the type to obsess over guys, to let them absorb my life like this. Are you thinking of me right now? Do you even remember me at all? Am I just an anecdote now?

Dear Nick,

I'll never send any of these letters. You'll never see what a pathetic example of feminism I am. If I were to write you a letter, I would know by your reply—or lack of one—what you really had thought. That's why I'm not writing you. I prefer the taste of just-friendship garnished with the possibility of love to the porridge of no more than friends.

Certainty kills the imagination. I want to treasure the ambiguity of our weekend because it's the one way I can hold on to it. I wish I could see into your mind, into the future.

I wish you were here right now, because I have so much to say to you.

*Katherine Gilbert*

# Understanding

I stare down the nose of the dock  
Into the currents eye.

Released from every pore in Italy, Cairo, Trinidad  
It gathers here at this ceaseless ocean and flies  
Rooting up the wood of the dock and congregating bathers in it's path.  
It leaves only the sharp sunlight of the afternoon on the water  
The soft kind that feels warm on the eyelids and then stabs the pupil, the  
cornea.

Underneath the ocean it is deep and black  
Sea creatures know nothing—they are swept up by a chilling broom and  
carried, soon becoming dead bodies, husks of shell, and iridescent  
skins.

My childhood bear was forgotten under heaps of clothing and dolls for seven  
years.

When he finally resurfaced I asked him what it was like.  
Cold, he says, cold and dark.

At night, I am cold without you.

*Christina Richardson*

# hard open surface

---

it was a time for a virus,  
I with my flock of orioles  
and you with your petty threats.

as the boys at the bandstand  
jubilantly cheered the  
'official ironmen rally song' in chorus

we wrinkled our noses  
for experiment only  
and cascaded down the rock face  
into the cold blue pool of disease.

*Zack Waldman*



*Katharine Smyth*

# Revelations

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My father bought his first boat, a black box, rust and tangled netting, when I turned six. Before he had worked with twenty other men on a much larger boat, a relic converted once the Navy no longer needed it after the Great Patriotic War. He didn't purchase the boat in the new sense, but he could letter Vassily Chelovek on the cabin. Because he owned the boat, more or less, he could pull fish from the nets so we could eat it fresh, instead of shredded up from a can.

Later- I was twelve- the boat he had once worked on, the ancient former mine layer, came under his command. Such a large boat was rarely run by a man his age- he was thirty-seven. I can't recall all the maneuvers and details, but my father had decent standing in the Party, captained well, and knew a few officials. He only held his post a short time. A week after the thirtieth anniversary of the battle at Stalingrad's end, the boat blew apart as if it had turned upon itself responding to the war three decades before.

That detail I know from the only man who escaped the boat, a sailor, Bakhtiar Khosbergenov. Khosbergenov washed up at the seawall's end, half drowned, unconscious. When he revived he left the hospital almost immediately and enlisted in the army then didn't return home for two years. Walking by the water to kill time, I bumped into him, nearly tripped over his outstretched foot as he sat, facing the ocean, on the seawall. He didn't recognize me.

"Watch yourself."

"Sorry." I looked up at him. "Are you Comrade Khosbergenov?"

"Why?"

"You look like him."

"I would hope so."

"So you are?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"You survived my father's boat."

"-Which?"

"Boat?"

"No, father. Whose son?"

"Captain Chelovek."

"Oh. Why are you here?- Chelovek's kid walking by the water."

"I do occasionally."

"Though you remember your father."

"I don't connect the two, my father and my walk."

"Never mind. I shouldn't expect you to. You were never on the boat."

I shifted back on my left foot. As we talked I tilted a little to each side. Swaying stiffly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bakhtiar Khosbergenov went back to the army after a month home. He drove a tank in the GDR and liked it there- I learned that from his mother, overheard her say it, actually. She wondered how her son could stand the armored rifle division. The tanks stank of ammonia when they fired their guns. Something in the propellant she said. She believed the ammonia had crazed him. I listened to her explain that, half speaking, half crying, at Khosbergenov's funeral. He'd shot himself on leave in Rügen, by the Baltic.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Tell me about the boat," I asked Khosbergenov, "when it sank."

"What is there that you don't already know?"

"A great deal. I know that my father left on February seventh that's when I saw him last. And I know they found him on the tenth. His body was the final one pulled from the water, except for the other man."

"Comrade Garnikov."

"Yes?"

"Comrade Garnikov's body was never recovered."

"Where's the importance in that?"

"You want me to explain what happened?"

"Why."

"Garnikov matters more than your father. Comrade Chelovek was immaterial."

"What do you mean?"

"Just let me tell you what happened without interruptions, questions."

"Fine."

"Good. At 23:00 I was manning the sonar. I had my feet resting on the instruments; I leaned back in my chair. The engine room technician, Mikail Andreavich, kept a stack of books onboard- he read voraciously- and one of his novels had absorbed me. I saw no reason to pay any great attention to the sonar. The sea floor, well, I expected it to remain mostly flat, that's what our charts stated. And we'd filled our hold. We didn't need to grab every pocket of fish swimming by.

In two more hours we planned to dock fifty meters from here. Garnikov had the wheel; He probably started his shift just like I did- expecting to sit back and waste time. He'd pointed the bow back toward Muynak. We were doing, oh, ten, twelve knots- about full speed with ten tons of herring on board."

"What else?"

"The rest of the story."

"Go ahead."

"Hold on a minute. Has anyone come across Garnikov?" He turned away from me, toward the water.

"No."

Khosbergenov paused. "The boat lurched and snapped me from my reading. The sonar showed nothing. I placed the book on a shelf above the instruments then went upstairs to the cabin and Garnikov, who slumped across the wheel. I can't understand why- we had no vodka, and he seemed perfectly healthy.

A cluster of gauges, those for the boiler, all redlined. The needle on "pressure" had actually broken off- I hadn't believed that could happen.

The emergency siren's pull, which hung from the ceiling, I ripped straight off its hanger. As the others crumbled out of bed and onto the deck, I thought I saw the stern, which housed the oiler, expanding. Somebody asked what was going on- I yelled that the boat was about to explode.

Comrade Chelovek-

"Why do you use his name when you know he's my father?"

*"Because you're his son - I don't enjoy connecting you to him - I call him Comrade Chelovek.*

When he heard me he pushed the lifeboat overboard. The boat was supposed to inflate when it hit the water, but instead it sank before taking a wisp of air. Somebody, maybe even the captain yelled to jump overboard. The others all did, and I leapt out the cabin window, at least fifteen meters above the water."

"Then the boat blew up?"

"After a few minutes. By the time I heard the explosion I'd swung pretty far from where I hit the water."

"And what happened then?"

"Your father and the other eighteen, I can't know, maybe debris hit them, possibly they just exhausted themselves."

Garnikov I can be sure about- right where I left him, arms splayed across the controls, he exploded with the boat. In the end he must have seemed like one of the fish."

"There's no more about my father?"

"Why should there be?"

"He was the captain."

"When he jumped, he was a bleary, scared man. As much or more than the others. Like Garnikov but walking."

"What about you?"

"I survived, joined the army after a coma, and somehow wound up back here on leave. Nothing's really happened since February ninth."

"Would you like dinner?"

"With you and your family?"

"My mother and myself."

"No." He turned back to the water.

\* \* \* \* \*

My mother never knew that I talked with Khosbergenov. She didn't discuss anything concerning the death. Everything with my father- his things, memories- she bottled. She preserved him in formaldehyde. Until she died, you could smell it as soon as you entered the house. She stank of formaldehyde.

\* \* \* \* \*

As I board a plane in Moscow, these thoughts about m

mother, and Khosbergenov, begin to condense in my mind. They crystallize. I saw crystallization demonstrated in Chemistry- very simple, beautiful. A teacher dropped this speck into a solution, then the speck blew into an increasing crystal, first slowly, then it shot outward to fill the entire beaker. My memories of Muynak work that same way during the flight. One infinitesimal thought explodes out until it engulfs my head, presses on the inside of my skull.

My last visit was all of two days, when Brezhnev was in power. This time I intend to stay longer; I'm not sure how long, a month maybe. I don't have any research pulling me back toward Moscow- nobody has any research. I have no reason to leave after a meaningless stay.

\* \* \* \* \*

I've spent a week home, staying with Victor Baudnik, an old friend. He works sporadically in the lone remaining cannery- newly privatized, he told me, owned my a German. Why anyone would buy a fish cannery this far from the ocean, he doesn't know.

I've decided to find my father's boat, or what's left of it- I know the crew's last reported coordinates. Now the wreckage sits on dry land. The explosion occurred at least thirty kilometers out. The Aral, everyone keeps telling me, seemed to shrink daily, until it receded completely from Muynak's view. Selling tours of the dry lake bed and renting ATV's, a tourist business has sprung up. It should be very useful for both of the tourists who enjoy visiting dying fishing towns near dry lakes. I plan to rent an ATV from that place tomorrow, even though I've never driven one. They seem the only possible way to travel across thirty kilometers of dust and garbage.

At 6:00 on my stay's eighth morning, I rent an ATV then bounce away from the seawall. On it a faded hammer and sickle rudgingly drops chips of paint onto the concrete below. The seawall and the docks, surreal relics superimposed on their landscape, sit from the ground. The dock pilings, the fallen buoys, rocks and cement dirtied by barnacles and dead algae, everything connotes water, but the sea lies far away. The scene looks to it for completion. As Khosbergenov said, the sea floor is mostly flat, a plain inclined onward. I imagine this is what a nuclear bomb leaves behind. I

designed bombers.

The things that collect on a lake bottom amaze me. I see the expected rusting boats- a few near shore remain anchored. Other, stranger things appear, though. I passed a cow's skeleton, bleached except where covered by stiff, blackened water plants. Five miles out, a car's nose erupts from the ground. In 1992 I read the Bible; I could very easily- it was no longer banned. The Aral reminds me of Revelations. Armageddon will look like this, a yellow desert strewn with trash.

Around 9:00 I reach the boat's final coordinates and see half a ship, a prow surrounded by dismembered metal. As I drive closer the scraps bar my way, so I get off the ATV and walk. Leaning against a rock, the ship's propeller shoots intact toward the sky. Years have polished it, given it a dreary sea/desert patina, but it remains a propeller. That, out of every piece of matter connected to the boat survives intact.

I enter the prow where it split from the rest of the hull- the opening looks like a train tunnel, the roof having a decaying church appearance (or, it looks as I imagine a church must after a decade and-a-half submerged). Sun penetrates rusted-through holes, and barbs of light pierce the boat's insides. I feel like I'm in a temple. Before the revolution I'd secretly read the Koran, bits of the Torah and *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*- they were easy books to buy, if you were determined enough. I look around the ship's rust-metal cavity. I stand silently, probably thirty kilometers from people. After a while I sit down on a rock that's poked through the hull. I think. I want a prayer mat and a place to wash myself.

*Nathan Littlefield*

# Checking In

If you ever pawn your grandmother's hairnet or get knee-tired from running away from the hangovers of bad years, if your pockets are down to the lint from scraping around for lost luck, you might come to the Lamplighter Motel. And if you lose your feet when you see the dust on the ashtrays or the scars on the lady checking out of the room they plan to can you in, you might never come in. You might just stand there and have a smoke with the pigeons who preach breadcrumbs along the sewers and telephone wires. You might look up a flight and down the hall to where I'm still waiting for the one who'd turn his arms to me.

You'd see Alastair there most days, washing his paws with the fish and hiss in his spit or sunning the grey in his beard. He can watch the stores shed their displays and the shadows grow, but he doesn't have anything to look for. I used to look, and every fish monger and one-day gambler was my dad coming back. I'd see some of me in them, so I'd try blinding one eye or ironing patches on my jeans; I'd watch for deals on crutches at the Salvation Army, just in case they were really empty of me. But yesterdays would harden in the sink. I would have my lids forced open to see that the men's backs were always going to be turned and that their walk would only take them further from me. I've shut my eyes and forsaken the window, but most of me won't let go of the sill, even while I seem to be reading the Funnies or grazing on chocolate bars. Alastair knows. He'd never say. The air here doesn't keep secrets and besides, he knows where the tuna cans come from. He doesn't need snickers or icknames or spitwads in a straw. He shames with his tail. Even if he tied my sneakers to the bed-post or shaved stale curses into my air, I'd scratch his ears just as hard and refill his water tin just as quick. If the only heartbeat within corridors of you stretches to the corners of the room to have its belly scratched, you wear away your ails trying to keep it there.

They tell me there were days scotch bottles and pills and milk saucers ago when I wasn't waiting, because my father's arms were here. Those were the days when men didn't need to shave,

when you could lure in one-eyed trout and half-sunrises with a worm on a hook. Back then, bacon frying in the skillet was meant to fill your belly and the arms casting the flame to fry were meant to keep you warm. The more I forget my dad, the brighter he gets. The more often he beat me at checkers and the better his cocktail sauce stung, the tighter he held me. I think today he'd be enough to shine somebody's shoes.

This is a place where no one washes the past from his hands where the urinals play rummy with the addicts on the third floor. Unwoven cobwebs and the dust of feet don't welcome questions but I don't have another way to know about him. My dad checked me in with half-spoken debts and small sympathy that I outgrew at the same time my legs fell outside my stroller. Before I took my questions to Frannie, I spent my time between the cigarette butt and bounced checks at the front desk, and talked baseball with the guests of the spiders who live in the cracks of the walls. Frannie owns needles in her stare and suspenders to keep her skirt on and the deed to the dirt on the floor and the leftovers in the freezer at the Lamplighter. She'll always narrow her eyes at me. Pimples and sudden inches mean some kind of unholy compact in Frannie's book.

She told me that my dad took a walk with luck on loan in his back pockets and his face turned into a wind that wouldn't let him look back for me. He went to fight someone else's war. He went with both eyes closed and a new grin tacked over his beard. He was a man who believed in lucky lures. Frannie chewed the meat of her cheek as she spoke, telling me that God Himself might as well come down the third story elevator and damn her to the basement as let him not come back and pay my bill. She had to breathe a little harder after that, dragging the fire out of half a pack and blowing up her gut with the complimentary mints on her desk. It must be hard to spit out words when you eat nails and the thigh bones of guests off the end of your cereal spoon every morning.

Jerry, the cook, burned the toast to tell me. When he went to the bars, my dad was his legend of choice. Jerry saw a man with holes in his jeans and a whistle for the air and a wink for a pretty girl, a man who could take good fortune from the squints of one-eyed birds who blew by before spring. He told me not to worry, sa-

that rabbits' feet like that don't run out. I'm not too sure about Jerry. My dad wore bigger boots with every round he downed at those bars. Jerry can read palms and tell the fortune of a good plate of steak and eggs, but I'm not too sure about a wandering man.

So, maybe one day the reel of smoke from the fat on the flame of Jerry's range will pull you in. Alastair may show you his tail if you look up to my window. Maybe you'll pity the dust enough to come back to see me. I'm not sure you'd want to reopen your eyes to take me in. I'm afraid of what you'd see: some kid living out of a suitcase, living on leftovers from a can, a kid who takes his advice from a tom cat and can only tell his secrets to the echo of his voice, a kid you owe for. If the burden of seeing me is too heavy for your lids, look out the window to the backs of the men I used to wish you were. You can keep your eyes shut as long as you like, but my eyes will never be open until I can see you.

*Mary Ziegler*

# A Kid's Outline of a Body

On June 2nd we pulled a body from the South Common pool, which had been filled for just a week. After about a month the police gave up trying to identify him.

The pool opened two days ago and fills up every afternoon with a sheet of people. When I sit on my chair, if I squint right, they look like a microscope image of bacteria on a petri dish. They splash in and out of the water without thinking about the body, or at least without seeming to.

Nobody's mentioned it, except for one kid. I caught him sticking tape on the bottom of the shallow end.

"What are you doing over there?"

"Nothing." He stuffed the tape in the back of his shorts.

"It looked like you had something in your hand."

He stood chest deep with one hand behind him to keep the tape from falling out.

"It wasn't that thing that just dropped on the bottom?"

"Nope."

"Step out of the water for a second."

"How come?"

"It'll just take a little bit."

"You said a second."

"More or less."

"Fine."

"So what's that thing that just dropped onto the pavement?"

"Nothing."

"Yeah?"

"It's your mother's phone number. Actually, it's tape."

"What are you sticking together?"

"Nothing."

"Serious?"

"Yup."

"Then how come you've got a roll of masking tape that you tried to stuff down your shorts?"

"Personal reason."

“What kind.”

“Mine- you really want to know?”

“That’s why I’m asking you.”

“I was doing something for the guy who drowned. I tried to draw him on the pool.”

“Draw?”

“Like the police. A chalk drawing, but with tape because of the water. So everybody’d know he was there.”

*Nathan Littlefield*

# American Spirit

My room smells against the law  
My atmosphere of carcinogenic alarm

I love to feel  
that  
self-deprecation  
that  
self-destruction  
that  
crazy worth thing  
going down my pipes  
as I try to cut the air  
with my breath  
or  
lack thereof

I love that smell  
of  
hiding rebellion  
or of  
oblivious oblivion  
in gaseous forms

*Caitlin Mulhern*



*Lisa Hsu*

# Ferry and Me

It was the 4th of July. I had no use for the holiday then, and I don't now. Ferry and I were heading into the city on a bus, just like we always did when we wanted to get away. We got off at Folsom and strolled around Japantown for awhile, eventually ducking our heads into a sushi bar for lunch. Then we split for the temple on Octavia.

We had wanted to go to Japantown because it was one of the few places where we could get away from all the hypocritical patriotism and U.S. flags flapping about, flying free in the wind. All those damn crew-cutted marines waving their flags and proclaiming their faith in the "Yoonaheted States of Amaireca" just made me sick.

So we meditated for a bit, and then sauntered back out into the grey day. The sky was pure melancholy, and I had expected rain from the minute I had gotten up that morning. But the clouds had held their breath, and we were still dry.

Me and Ferris stopped into a convenience store to pick up some sodas, and then headed back towards the bus stop, where we encountered a couple rich-looking guys with laptops. When we sat down, they edged further away from us. When we set our rucksacks down on the bench, they practically melted into the plexiglass. Ferry gave up all pretense of politeness and snickered to himself at this while I made a valiant attempt to be courteous. I pulled back my rucksack and set it on the ground in front of us, but I don't think they wanted to sit anywhere near us. Some people are afraid of nothing.

Finally the bus got there and we found a nice quiet place at the back to read. Only there was this crazy old guy who was sitting in the seat in front of us and he kept talking a mile-a-minute about his life. He asked me if I had school.

"No, school's been out for awhile now," I replied, which caused him to look first perplexed, then cross, and then downright wistful.

He said "Well, back in my time, we never got a break. Soon"

finals ended we rushed back to help ma and pa on the farm. Yesiree, damn rustic!" And then he'd toss his head back, grab his bottle of Jack Daniels, and downed a fifth of it or so in a couple gulps.

Ferry and I were planning on spending some time on the Haight, but it wasn't an area either of us was too familiar with. Sure, we'd both been record shopping in Ruff-Trade and Revolver, but it wasn't really our home ground or nothing. So we were sitting on the bus reading our magazines, and this old guy gettin' drunker and drunker behind us, and I got to thinking if he had a home. You know, if he had a wife, a family, or even a place to sleep, a change of clothes, something to eat. That's the one thing that gets me about the city; it can be so depressing.

Finally the driver called out the street and we got off. I took one last look at the old guy, and he seemed to wink one old wrinkled eye at me through his medicine bottle. That was it.

We walked around for awhile, just checking out people, before finding a Ben & Jerry's. We split a cup of Cherry Garcia and then headed up the street to Revolver Records. I can't really explain what goes through my mind every time I go in there. It's a battle, really. The real people, the people who know what it's like to live out on the streets, or at least have to struggle, and the affluent pretty boys in their Tommy Hilfiger shirts and pre-holed Gap jeans. You know what I mean? I wake up in the morning, I reach into my drawer, I grab some clothes, I put them on. I don't give a damn what I look like, and that's a mark of pride for me.

I strolled over to the used records so I could look for an old Mudhoney album, but there was this chubby kid blocking the M's in a Metallica shirt. I tapped him on the shoulder to get him to move, and he turned around. At first he looked like a frightened rat, but then he looked over at his friends for support and he got a little more composed.

"What the hell do you want?" he asked in a strange voice. I ate those voices, those prepubescent jock voices. Here's a kid who's twelve years old, probably still singing alto or soprano, and trying to talk like he's Barry White or something.

"I was just going to ask you to scoot over. I wanted to look at *Suck You Dry*," I said coolly.

"Yeah? Well, too damn bad. You can't get in here until I find my Megadeth album," he replied in that same damn voice.

I just wanted to punch his stupid metalhead face in. I looked over at this big burly guy with a mohawk who was fishing around for a No Use For a Name album and he just laughed.

"What can you do?" he asked. "We're being taken over by Generation Prep."

Apparently, Metallica-boy took offense to this, and turned around again like he wanted to fight. I just laughed in his face.

"You don't even have a record player, do you? You've just read in RIP or Hit Parader that vinyl's cool, and now you're going to go buy some, right?" I asked.

By this time Ferry had ambled over to see what the commotion was about. As soon as he came over, Metalhead's friends decided to join in as well. It was hysterical. Prep vs. punk in a storewide battle.

Metalboy backed off of his position and retreated to the safety of his friends, where he immediately opened his stupid mouth again. "Yeah, what's up now? You wanna fight?" He shook his fist at me and revealed a stainless steel Swiss Army knife that couldn't have cost under eighty bucks. I just laughed and stepped into the M's, found my Mudhoney album, and walked to the counter with Ferry. We bought the record and then walked out, with the rich boy pack following us.

So we're walking along and we see this guy on the street begging for change. He had a spiderweb tattooed on his face. I explained to him about the trouble Ferry and I were in and gave him two dollars, and he grinned that homeless grin I love to see. It's worth the money, you know? Just to see them smile like that. It's worth the money.

I guess he signalled to his friends or something who were peddling down the street, because they all started walking up. Pretty soon it's like a war, with us on one side staring over at these rich boys, just enjoying the fact that they were getting nervous. Metallica just shrugged nervously, held up his hands, and they all turned around. Case closed.

"Thanks, man. I'm sorry to bother you," said Ferry and

then he gave him some more change.

"Diggety-dank," the guy replied, and he nodded his grizzled old head.

So we kept on walking down Haight, and finally we came to the Haight-Ashbury Music Center.. Cool place. Unfortunately, there were some dumb people in there. There was this one kid with sorta longish blond hair and a little stud in his right ear. He had on some expensive-ass shirt and some cords, and he looked like the typical clean-cut sun cat.

Anyways, this kid just sat around the effects pedals the entire time, playing the same crappy Smashing Pumpkins riff and acting like he was all cool. Me and Ferry took up spots right behind and kept pacing around to let him know that we were there, but all it seemed to do was seem to make him more selfish.

You know, in Buddhism, the biggest thing is giving. In Jodoshinshyu, which is what I am, we give all that we can and it's no big thing. The bodhisattva of Jodo Shin's idea is basically "We had dinner and I picked up the tab. Good night", in the words of Gary Snyder. That's just how it is. I guess you could say my biggest problem is that I think and fully expect everyone else to be that way also, and people just aren't. People don't give a damn about anyone else or their lives, it's just me, me, me.

My parents always tell me I'm too cynical. I guess they're right; I'm far too caustic for my own good sometimes. I can remember when I was interviewing at high schools and all the admissions people would always ask for me to give them one word to describe myself, to which I would always respond, "Mordant." Ferry's even worse, though; we're both natural skeptics.

So anyways, there I was getting bummed about this kid taking up all this time, and it's depressing as hell, so I just took a walk over to the drum department. Ferry stayed. Just as I'm getting up Golden Boy gets up too, thinking he's cool and all. And Ferris just sneaks in right behind him and grabs the guitar right before the kid even puts it on the stand. Beautiful.

"What the hell, man? I wasn't finished!" whined the kid.

"You looked pretty damn finished to me. Usually when someone gets up and puts something back they're finished," replied

Ferry as he turned to begin playing.

"Hell, no. I'm not done. Gimme th' guitar back, man," he said.

Some people are just jerks. Once you learn that fact, you'll be fine in life.

"Too damn bad. Go pretend like you know how to surf or somethin'," Ferry said and turned his back.

I just laughed and laughed. Ferry's sharp as a tack, and witty too.

Haight was kind of making me upset, just one thing after another, so I decided that we should go. Ferry and I hopped on a bus and were going to head home. It was 6:30 and neither of us really wanted to spend any money on food.

We got on the 39, which takes you to Fisherman's Wharf, where you can get a bus going anywhere.

"How much money you got, Fer? I've got seven bucks n' some change. We better get going sometime soon," I said, rifling through my wallet.

"I can add about fifteen to that. We're fine. There's noe right over there. Let's ask him how much to the peninsula," said F e r r i s .

We jogged across a busy street over to this yellow cab. This short bald guy with a cigar and these really weird aviator sunglasses was sitting in the front seat. He looked dead, but I asked him anyways. I guess we woke him up, 'cause he was kinda ornery when he answered.

"20 dollars to San Mateo. Get in."

So we did. There's just something about taxi cabs, you know? The seats are all ripped up and taped back on, they all smell like something unliving was rotting in the trunk, and sometimes you get these trippy drivers that just don't make sense.

So we were driving along the freeway right next to this big bus full of tourists taking pictures of us. On the friggin' freeway 101 was never so scenic, I joked to Ferry. Alluva sudden, the bus swerves into our lane right in front of us. Our guy, completely unfazed, slams hard on the brakes, beats all hell out of his horn and jukes the car a lane over.

“Some people just can’t drive. Usually bus drivers are pretty good, but...” He trailed off.

So we drove alongside the bus and he stares in at the driver.

“Oh, of course. It’s some Asian chick. They’re the worst. First of all, men are just better drivers than women. But even after that, y’know, you’ve got all the different types o’ people. Asians are the worst. They’re a menace. Then there’s all those people drivin’ around with that stupid fish on the back of their car. Those born-again, Saint’s Alive religious types. You just can’t be too careful these days,” he remarked with not a hint of sarcasm.

Ferry and I just looked at each other and burst out laughing. I don’t think either of us really believed what he had just said.

“Everyone has a right to express their their own opinions,” I murmured with a smirk.

“And in some places are even free to exercise that right,” responded Ferry dryly.

Next thing I know we’ve pulled up in front of Ferry’s house in San Mateo Park. Both sets of our parents were out of town, and we were just hanging out at his house.

We headed upstairs to Ferry’s room and ordered a pizza. Then we sat around waiting for it, watching TV. Seven thirty is a pretty useless time when it comes to TV, so we decided to watch a movie. Ferry didn’t have much of a selection, but he did have a few videos of some concerts he had been to, so we watched those.

It was only about nine-fifteen or so when we finished our pizza, so we decided to play some music. We went out to the garage and jammed on guitars for awhile. Finally, these old people come over and knock on the garage door. We opened it up and this wrinkled relic starts talking to us. After every fifth word or so she had to keep pushing her glasses up back on her nose, and it started getting annoying.

“Ah live o’er on Ericson Road, and I gotta tell you, you boys re disturbing mah whole family! I mean, here we are tryin’ to have nahse relaxin’ chat on the back porch and you’re noise is getting all ne way up the hill to us,” she complained.

“Look, ma’am, I’m sorry. We’re really not playing loud at l, firstly. And secondly, we have a contract with the neighbors

that says we can play until 10:30 every night, which means that we still have 45 minutes or so," I answered.

"What? I beg your pardon, I didn't hear," she croaked.

"Look, lady. You can't even hear what he's saying from right next to you, and yet you can hear through the door and the walls of a one hundred percent soundproofed garage several blocks from you? I'm not thinking so," bellowed Ferry loudly enough that the whole neighborhood could probably hear him.

The woman got a look of comprehension on her face as she finally heard something, but then she got all pissed off and started waving her arms like she was trying to fly. Ferry just got up and shut the garage door right in her face. He's so irreverent, but it's funny as hell sometimes.

Well, we figured that we had pretty much gotten into enough trouble for playing music loud in the garage, so we turned everything off and headed upstairs with Ferry's acoustic. It was a beautiful night; the clouds had all shuffled off to bed and left the watching moon to smile coyly in the sky. It was far too hot in Ferry's room for comfort so we crawled out his window and onto his roof. I don't know, maybe it just me, but when you're out above everything else and there's nothing above you but the great black nothing and you just get to thinking what and who else is out there...there's something magical about roofs. Every time I'm on the roof I feel like I've finally finished my climb, to wherever I'm going.

Of course, such a tranquil night could never last in the crazy world we live in, and the Fourth of July fireworks began just as we began to talk. The once peaceful, silent night suddenly exploded into a brilliant burst of color, the thunder of the skies distracting us from whatever sacred purpose we had intended to accomplish. We merely watched for a few minutes, then did our best to drown out the fireworks and return to the serene evening which had so recently blanketed us.

So we sat around and strummed on the guitar and talked until around 2:30. We talked about all that had happened that day and soon we were talking about how depressing everything was and—*I don't know*—there's just something so interesting about those discussions.

"I know what you're saying. It's just like, we're wired different, man. I can't—we're all in this together, aren't we? I mean, isn't everyone after the same thing anyways? We're all in this together, aren't we? Hell, we're all the same inside. There's a mushroom in Alaska that above ground looks like thousands across several miles, but under the ground it's all the same organism. Miles long, y'know?" said Ferry in his rambling quickspeak.

"Definitely. The reason the world's not going anywhere is because we just can't recognize the fact that we are all pursuing a common goal. Sure, we have our disagreements. That guy in the record store was a metalhead and I'm not. But that's insignificant, so superficial," I responded in my singsong drawl.

"And unfortunately, it's those same minor disagreements that cause wars, famines, all that stuff. Sometimes I feel like we're the only sane people alive," muttered Ferry dejectedly.

What else was there to say? We scanned the horizon for lights, cars, any sign that the world was still alive. Nothing. You can see so much from a rooftop sometimes. Maybe a couple of miles.

One time I went to the Statue of Liberty and looked out. On clear days you can see so far—but for what? What do you see? I'm not sure the world is still alive sometimes. If time's all relative, then our race has never been on this planet for a few seconds or so. And sometimes that makes me think that we're on autopilot, that the body's dead but the severed head still fights for a little while. You know, like how a chicken can run around even after it's decapitated.

Ferris and I then crawled back in through the open window and went to sleep with some jazz station on the radio playing softly in the corner and keeping itself company.

.....

The next day we decided to walk downtown to Burlingame and San Mateo. We got dressed and headed down Santa Inez to El Camino. We stopped off at the gas station 'cause they had a minimart and we wanted to eat before we started off anywhere. We paid for our Skittles' and Pepsi's and then we left. Gas stations to me are the epitome of all that's wrong with our country. A few overprivileged,

wealthy, talking suits buy up all the oil that they can and then figure they'll cut costs by paying their workers wages that are smaller than the bottom line of an eye chart. The places always feel unhealthy to me; the smell of gas, the slicks all over the cement gray floors all seem to frighten me a little. I was glad as hell when we left the station behind.

We first strolled up El Camino towards Burlingame Avenue. I don't know; the place sucks but it's the perfect people watching place. All the coolies and toadies who think they're God's gift to pop culture stroll down the street and it's the best place to be usually when you're depressed.

We walked to Burger King and ordered to go, then found a nice bench a little ways up the street to sit down on. The sun was shining bright and the motherly arms of a small tree planted behind the bench in the concrete kept us shaded. We ate our food and watched as group after group of people passed by in their preppy clothing, suavely sipping their mocachinolattecappofrappos. We snickered as one particular hipster seemed to run a hand through his grocery store dyed hair every 4 steps.

-Oh no. Don't look. Do not establish eye contact, grimaced Ferry and dropped his head almost into the bag of food.

-What? Who is it? I don't see, oh. Oh. Aww man, not them. Now we'll have to have a lengthy conversation about everything under the sun until *they'll* get bored with *us* and thankfully leave. I tried to look pleased to see them, but it was a struggle.

Erin and Jayla walked up to us twin guns blazing. They removed their identical Marlboro Lights at the same time and offered up a chipper

-Hi, it's nice to see you! Then they put out their cigs and sat down on the bench, bookending us.

-So what's nu? Haveya heard the nu NOFX album? It's prettyfriggencool, said Jayla in her chipmonk(sic)-on-speed voice. In 8th grade, I had regretfully turned most of our small middle school on to SoCal punk rock. I had long since passed through that phase and advanced to music that required a little more effort in the songwriting. I'm not trying to down punk; For sheer energy, there nothing better and I still listen to a lot of punk music, but to live

and die by music that you don't even have a clue about is just wrong.

-Yes, we've heard it, Jay. It's okay, I guess, I said, with just a twinge of frustration getting through in my voice. I could be nice if I wanted, but Ferry would be damned if he was going to just take their crap this time.

-Yeah, it, like, just came out and it's great. There's this one song on it, about how Fat Mike used to be homeless? Yeah. And I, like, really iDENTify with it, you know? And there's this other song about how he's glad that Jerry Garcia died, and I'm just like, right on, man. You said it! Erin said in her roller coaster voice.

-Yeah, whatever, Erin. 'I really iDENTify with him being homeless' he said in his best impersonation of her voice. -You've never once been in a situation where your wallet hasn't had 50 dollars of Daddy's money ready to spend on your new fascination with the music of us common people. Any time you ever wanted anything, there were daddy and mommy with checkbooks open and mouths closed, feeding you Oh, and what else? 'I agree with him. Jerry Garcia SUCKED' (he impersonated her again). Who are you trying to fool? Neither of us are gonna believe a word of your bull anymore. When hippie music was cool you went on and on about 'Skeletons in the Closet' and how Jerry spoke for you. Now you throw him away like you do money! Oh, and just as a point of reference, that new NOFX album has been out for 6 months. It just hadn't received any radio play until recently. Why don't you go back home and count your dollar jar? Ferry said, getting so worked up that I rose from his traditional slouchy posture into a rigid, straight backed position as he gestured for them to go.

Right. WhatEVER, mister cool. Let's go Jay, we don't need this! Erin whimpered as she got up and sulked off with her punk rock thos between her legs.

That was kinda harsh, Fer, I said, mildly astonished.

Yeah well, I bet they stop bugging us from now on, he said with a leam in his eye and a grin crossing his face like the Great Wall crosses China.

So we left our bench, keeping our trash to be recycled later. We walked on up the street to Record X-Change, where we encountered a store full of coolies discussing the upcoming release of

the new Dishwalla album. I just ignored them. I just felt so sorry for them. Ferry and I quickly cased the selection of used CD's until we found what we were looking for; a vinyl copy of Big Star's excellent album, 'Radio City'. We purchased it while all the Dishwalla fans laughed at us for buying unhip music. While Ferry bought the album I approached the kids behind us.

-I'm sorry, I must've missed the humor in me buying a Big Star album. Could you maybe explain what's so funny? I said convincingly.

-Sure. Maybe it's the fact that Big Star SUCKS! It's too bad that you're too mainstream to listen to underground music like Pennywise and Sublime, said a fat kid with bleached blonde hair and a Green Day shirt on.

I snickered at him, and then, in between sporadic fits of laughter I replied-First of all, I'm sure you've never even heard Big Star because they're not played on mainstream radio, which is your source for underground bands. Secondly, as far as me being mainstream, I saw Sublime at a show that only 50 people attended, 2 or 3 years ago, when they still WERE an underground band. The very fact that morons like you get off on the fact that you think you're cool for listening to them means that they ARE mainstream. See ya, I said and walked off with Ferry.

-What's getting into you? You're starting to sound like me! Ferry laughed.

-Sorry, I gues I snapped.

I could hardly believe it myself. But the more I thought about things, the more I realized that we WERE the only sane people. The world had gone nuts and Ferry and I were lost out on the river in a class five.

We headed back down Burlingame Ave, turned left on El Camino and walked aways down to San Mateo, where we stopped into B-Street Music and played guitar for a little. Luckily, we didn't have any runs ins to speak of and were actually able to enjoy a little bit of our day.

As we were walking out I got the idea that we should embark on some kind of journey. Not some religious purging experience hero-quest thing, just some sort of trip out doors. Away from

anything but the great parts of the world—the trees, streams, and sky.

‘ So we hurried home to plan out our trip. But Ferry’s resources on geography were a little bare, so we had to walk several miles over to my house and use my atlases and books.

-Okay. Something within a few days driving distance, all right? No further north than Washington, no further south than Tijuana, no further East than...

-All right, I get the point, interrupted Ferry. -So how about we go kayaking out in Colorado somewhere? I know it’s kind of far, but we can strap up the kayaks and drive aways. Ferry turned sixteen 3 months before and got his license, but neither of us ever cared much for driving because of the strain it puts on the environment.

-Sounds good to me. I’ve always wanted to see the real Colorado, I said as I walked out the door and downstairs to the garage where we kept the kayaks. Ferry followed and soon we had both of my kayaks loaded up and tied down on top of Ferry’s sport utility truck, which had been at my house for days and days just sitting in the garage collecting dust.

We drove to the grocery store and picked up our supplies. We planned to go out for 2 weeks. And as we drove off down the road, and the memories of the last day and a half left behind us like a litterer throwing a wrapper on the street without a twinge, I couldn’t help but be glad.

And as we wound on down the highway and through small towns and forests and flats and everything else, I couldn’t help but realize just how big the world really was. Just how many people lived here, on this planet. Under my moon, my sky, my sun, my clouds, and yeah we are all human, I think.

We broke for dinner around 8:30 that night in some fairly large town and decided to eat at a diner on the main drag. We walked in and sat down in a comfy booth and waited until a middle aged woman with her hair and her soul tied back came to take our order. Her name was Becky. Ferris ordered a ham and cheese sandwich, and I decided on a burger and fries. She shuffled back to the kitchen with our order and I realized how depressing it must be to live like that. Ferry and I looked directly into each other’s eyes and

we silently vowed to never end up like Becky. I felt so bad I wanted to take her with us, away from the diner where she had already served up her heart a long, long time ago.

We ate our food, greasy of course, and then headed back onto the freeway for awhile until, around 2 we pulled over onto the side of the road and climbed inside the shell over the bed of the truck to sleep. It's frightening to me to sleep with such a low ceiling. I hate feeling my breath lightly reflected back at me. It makes me claustrophobic. But then again, so did the town we ate dinner in. Ferry and I said our goodnights and headed off to never, never land.

*Graham Norwood*

# let the good lord do the driving

... We brought in the New Year  
(you and i)  
breaking glasses, biting lips.  
there was some cake( your skirt hitched up)  
i was screaming for your fingernails.  
& You with your  
shush. dot, shush.  
dot, shush.  
misunderstand me if this is not the case

But I'm throwing everything  
to the summerstove.  
burn back the truth to them  
or the smoke should suffice.

*ekoms si elbativeni eht esoppus i*  
i suppose the inevitable is smoke

*Erik Jungbacker*



*Katharine Smyth*

# Weaver Voodoo Sabotage

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A brief story in four parts

Part I: Mathua, New Jersey , is a small, depressed town fifteen or twenty minutes south of Elizabeth. Seven hundred Welsh families, fresh from Ellis Island, led by the young Thomas Mathua Mining Company overseer, Nathan J. Eurant, founded the town in 1877 as a coal mining operation for the aforementioned corporation. By December, 1879, only twenty families remained, and Mr. Eurant had been murdered by his mistress', the late burlesque hall attraction Sue Ellen Charles', Pekinese, in what was the most sensational and infamous death in New Jersey for at least three weeks. Professor Arthur K. Shaon, Jr., noted scholar in the field of non-Carnegie fossil fuel magnates of the late nineteenth century, can probably best describe the cause of this cataclysm. In his biography, T. Mathua, he wrote:

"Then there was Mathua, New Jersey. This, though it did not directly participate in the economic collapse of the Mathua fortune, along with several other economic misjudgments in the 1870's, contributed to the weakened state which made it vulnerable to the final disaster at Trumbell, Montana. The problem with Mathua was relatively uncomplicated. The company invested ten million dollars to found a coal mine at Milifred's Mount in New Jersey. After seven or eight months, it became evident that there was no coal whatsoever on the sight. To this day it is unclear why a mine was founded at a coal-less site, for it was the first job for its overseer, Nathan Eurant, who died before the mine was closed and so never had the opportunity to prove himself either genuinely inept or merely lacking beginner's luck. Of the twenty families who remained, fifteen were simply too poor to uproot, four were hearty enough to stay behind [and had government jobs—they were the postmaster, sheriff, justice of the peace, and mayor], and one, a Mr. Jonah Lewell as Jonah Llewellyn, of Radnorshire, was too complicated for the man at customs.], stayed on out of a firm belief that there was indeed coal in the mountain."

Part II: Sterling Lewell, born in 1934, was by now an excruciatingly old man. His once thick curls had fled him in such a way that they now closely resembled his pubic hairs, and his chin, whose cleanliness he had once prided himself on, now had the small white hairs which every septuagenarian knows are impossible to shave. He had never amounted to much except having played Nanki-Pu in the Mathua high school's *The Mikado*; he had never loved but once, and he had thrown her away during the Korean War, because he believed that the only man worthy of her would be a soldier, which his teenage scoliosis prevented him from ever becoming. He had been a bright B student in high school, but had taken no college, for in 1952 a brand new factory was opened in Mathua, right on top of the ruins of Mr. Eurant's office, at the corner of Wickscastle and South Main. The Captain Taste TV Dinner Company owned the factory, and there the citizens of Mathua would eventually produce the what the employment advertisements called the "most essential element of the Modern TV Dinner," the plastic tray.

Lured by the siren song of the TV dinner, as so many poor souls have been since then, he began work as a full-time Assembly Line Operator in mid July, 1952. He was an ALO from that day until January 15, 1969. During that span, he called in sick twice both times with a rather mild case of Cholera (as he lived with his mother, one Beatrice Lewell, until 1973, and was obliged to drink and fetch her well water). He crossed the picket line during each of the fifteen strikes which hit the plant during this tenure, except for the strike of October 4, 1964, when he failed to cross the line on account only of his Cholera. On that bleak January morning when he lost his job as an ALO, he was promoted to Floor Supervisor and a hamburger-and-chicken-finger dinner was held in his honor at *Hanlin's*, the town's pub, located at Sixth Street and Roth.

In 1982, the Weaver Chicken Corporation bought up all the plants which had once been owned by the Captain Taste Company, which had been forced to close by the New Jersey state legislature after it had been discovered that they had included rather unsavory parts of the cow in their Beef and rather unsavory parts of the animal kingdom in their Chicken. Lewell was demoted back to ALO, as his lack of any college experience disqualified him for holding

ing a management position under the Weaver Corp. From 1982 on, he returned to his post at Processor 37, day in and day out, except on Sundays.

Part III: Early Tuesday morning (or late Monday night, as insomniacs, students, and other irrationals know it), Lewell turned off his television set, a 1984 Toshiba, for the final time, and crawled into his cot. Though his hands were swaddled by the green sheets, they trembled horribly with the night. His mouth opened with a dull, piercing silence. He turned and turned and turned and, and, and. He pneumatically flew up in bed, his eyes dripping with sweat. Lowering his feet to the linoleum floor, he rose and went to the kitchen, where he diligently made for himself a bacon sandwich on dry white bread. He especially liked the way the soft, greasy bread covered the crunchy bacon like an embrace—it comforted him.

He sat on his countertop, perched like a condor. The sun rose only a few hours later, and discovered him bird-like still. Set to cry each morning an atonal revelry, his alarm wrenched him from his twitchy-pendulum trance. Heavily, yet mechanically he glided to his dresser drawer, and drew from it his uniform, which, in addition to being uniform with the wardrobes of all other ALO level employees, was also uniform with every uniform he'd worn since the takeover, for Weaver never considered new uniforms.

Lewell owned no automobile, but since he lived on South Main, a mere ten blocks from the plant, he would simply walk every morning. Before leaving his apartment, Lewell grabbed the plastic packet, the domum for the felt-tipped marker set he'd bought for his grand-niece, which she had left in the den shortly after he had given them. On his way to work, he carried them under his arm, clutching them from all the hands which yearned to snatch them from him. "Greedy hands are everywhere," he self-whispered, "Except on the arms of somebody you want to give to." He eventually tuffed the markers into his jacket, which was patched and holed and had been worn each morning in the fall and winter since he had received it as a gift from his sister in 1967.

Pushing down his punch card (a quaint aspect of the factory which was never upgraded, tourists still come just to see it), he settled into his true home, away from the televisions and the beds

and the sandwiches, Processor 37. Arthritis slowed the levers of 37 and a cataract in his left eye had permitted some defective containers to pass, but Lewell was still generally qualified for his position, and so stayed on as a member of the floor crew, even as many his age had been "promoted" to the janitorial staff (their union was less dynamic than the floor workers', to say the least, and was lenient about pensions). Nearing Retirement Age, Lewell had often heard the Floor Supervisor discussing his fate (or he presumed it to be his fate) with the Factory Manager, a portly, though fastidious man in his middle forties. Lewell was leaving in only two or three years, and he acknowledged it fully.

He took the Olive Green marker out of the package and drew a strange symbol, a circle with two lines intersecting within it, on the carapace of Processor 37.

Return to work he did. And the following day the same, the sweat, the sandwich, the bird, the markers, the punch card, and he again worked, that curious little plastic box at his feet.

He took out the Red marker and drew a different pictogram, a "V" with some dots that made it resemble a rat's head, some seven or eight inches from the first.

Suddenly possessed by a spirit of enthusiasm for his toil, he returned to his duties at 37 as if he had never ceased. He worked tirelessly, even considering his age, for several hours, until lunch time. In the cafeteria, he had a soggy tuna salad sandwich, which was cold and moist and flaccid from its overextended period in the refrigerator. During his second or third sip of cola, he began to sweat profusely, especially from behind his ears and under his chin, and the sweat began to run in rivers and torrents down his face into his shirt and down his straw and into his soda and onto his sandwich and onto the table and onto the floor and everywhere and began to cover everything and everything and everything and.

He grabbed his napkin and swabbed down his forehead. Rising quickly, he took his tray to the depository at the southwest corner of the room. He discovered that, as he walked, his movements became exaggerated, as his limbs became much heavier, while his strength increased in turn. Each movement became twitch-like and excessively powerful. He was like a giant who had suddenly

found himself imprisoned within a man's body. With all his new strength, his body was a trap. He was shackled by chains that were invisible to him, but he was powerful enough to throw off his chains. And yet he didn't. Instead he trudged along to the depository, held down, held back, drawn by unseen chains that shouldn't bind a dwarf. And he was a giant. He was a giant. He had strength. But he was in chains.

His clothing was drenched in sweat as he returned to 37, and it stuck to him with the itchy, clingy discomfort of an August 9<sup>th</sup> afternoon. His nose had begun to drip unnoticeably, so he wiped it with his shirt sleeve. His hands were heavy and his fingers had become swollen and gigantic; it was becoming impossible to control those unwieldy digits. Trying to steady himself, he rested them on his cold stool which stood just behind 37. He was heaving and raining all over everything. God had promised never again to destroy the earth by water's flood. He had promised.

Heaving and heaving he glanced his grand-niece's abandoned package. It had a yellow exterior that was made of this opaque rubbery plastic and resembled a book cover. Within was a prison, little clear-livid-dead plastic cells which bound the mortal capsules of the exploding colors, and did their best to constrain the colors themselves; this is impossible, though—color is ephemeral, a ghost in the still living shell: it goes where it desires.

The colors got up. And walked. They grabbed his hand and commanded. His great distended digits were the unwitting pawns in the great marker jailbreak. His hands were uncontrollable. They were too heavy to move and too powerful to restrain. Color had mastered. It had broken the beast, and was riding it gently. Even his eyes became heavy, now. His glance bore the full weight of the lion's glare. Great armies crumbled to ash at his eye. The whole earth began to fall under the great mass of his head. His neck was slowly breaking, but the muscles rippled and exploded like a rocket, so his head stayed motionless, and no one knew. His mouth froze as his masseter muscle rushed out of control. The extremities of his field of vision turned subtly violet. The purple moved inwards, a great backwards explosion, leaving a wake of brown, and then black. Black was encroaching. Consuming everything. Everything.

"Too Fail," he muttered to himself as he fell into the encroaching darkness, "Two Fail. To Fail. Too Fail. Two Fail. To Fail. Too Fail. Two Fail."

He slept the sleep of a chained monkey, bound by iron tethers to the cobble-wall. He was imprisoned inside a darkness which none of his screaming could pierce. So he slept, not calmly, nor restfully, but not lightly—his great heft held him to sleep as it did to everything else. As he slept, his muscles slowly relaxed and became weak. His masseter was the first to calm, and, within his quiet carapace of shade, Stirling Lewell, unbeknownst to anyone, smiled a real, true smile.

He was dreaming. Dreaming of the war. All the exercise and weights which he had used in an attempt to correct his disfigured back had helped in his dream, and he was able to enter the army. He was standing at the bus stop out of Mathua, carrying a small duffel bag with some personal effects within. He didn't know what was in the bag as he was dreaming, and what's more, he didn't care. The Girl, her name was Mary Collins, was wearing a light dress which kept her cool in the hot summer breezes. It was early August, he knew. Her bouncing red curls were hidden by a sun bonnet of woven straw, which she had purchased at the shore the summer before. She had burned easily that time, he recalled, and he had had to nurse her, since she could not stand to move for pain. He had never burned in his life, and could not imagine at the time what it was like to be trapped in one's body without the power to move. She had very thin, sickly lips, and gaunt and spindly fingers, but her nose was beautiful, and he loved her for it. Her fingers were like spider-legs as she ran them through his brown curls, but he wasn't repulsed, for he adored her and her nose, and this love overwhelmed his disgust for her gangly fingers.

She was saying goodbye, he imagined, as he went off to war. His parents were there, too, but their goodbye had been a perfunctory one. Not that he didn't love his parents; he did, very much, but he desired above all else, to say goodbye to the Girl, while he was on his way to boot camp, to let her know that he was a soldier, a hero.

In the waking world, their parting had been abrupt and distant. He had written her a letter after having been declared 4-F,

on that very evening, in fact, which stated that he must never see her again, as he was unworthy of her. He never mentioned his draft certification, desiring to keep his shame private. She of course didn't believe him, "unworthy of you" is a truly ridiculous excuse, even when it's true, and she just assumed that he had fallen in love with another woman, or discovered he was gay or something, and as such never sought him out. He never learned this, of course. He never saw her again. She died of lung cancer in 1982.

Dreaming. Her hands passed over his scalp, tugging gently on his locks. She kissed him, the way she had kissed him on their second date: powerfully but without force. While waking, he had never told her that he loved her most of all for that kiss. He had hoped he wouldn't have to, that she loved him for that same reason, that it was telepathic. Dreaming, she knew. Their embrace parted as the last recruit before Lewell grabbed him by the shoulder to pull him off. He dutifully boarded the bus, but turned to her as the door closed. She mouthed to him, "I love you."

He never killed anyone during the war, never even fired his gun. He was killed by a Russian land mine. Blew him to bits. He was a Purple Heart hero.

As he exploded, the dark cage he was enclosed in shattered, and he was freed. The light penetrated his eyes first, but in the form of white-hot rods which impeded his vision, rather than aid it. It was only by the time that his hands had been unchained that his vision returned.

Accustomed to the orange tint of dreams, his eyes were unprepared for the brightness and clarity of fluorescence. As 37 gradually came into focus, it was revealed to be nothing but an indecipherable mesh of scribbling. Glyph had crossed over glyph as he slept, and there was marker everywhere, on 37, on the floor, on his fingers, even a little on his nose. "To Fail," he said, and rose, leaving the uncapped colors free on the floor. He returned silently to work, attempting to ignore the glares of all the ALO's on his floor, who had seen him in his fit.

It was now 2:46.

By 4:25, the FS had been notified and had made his decision with unusual clarity and speed. He never even called the Fac-

tory Manager. As Lewell was punching out, the FS served him the pink slip and instructed him not to return to the factory the following day. It was an unorthodox job. You're supposed to fire someone during the day, by taking them into your office, explaining things to them, making it gentle. And you're supposed to let them return for their personal effects. Heaven only knows why he never fulfilled the first, but the second rule was broken because of the unusual circumstances surrounding Lewell himself. He had no personal effects. He had never had any.

Lewell passed on that evening, during his sleep.

Part IV: The marker was scrubbed from 37 that evening by the night janitors. The next day, the FS was ordered by the FM to find a replacement operator for 37. A woman was hired five days later; she was an out-of-towner, as no native would take 37 after what had happened to Lewell.

In her first monthly evaluation, the FS had naught but praise for her. He wrote:

"Assembly Line Operator 37 must be commended on her drive, work ethic, and skill. In only one month, she has mastered all the facets of her post, one of the more complicated stations along the line. In fewer [sic.] than a month, she has turned Processor 37 from one of the lowest performing to one of the entire highest performing in the factory. She has personally doubled the efficiency at Processor 37. Floor Supervisor 4-A's recommendation for Employee of the Month."

*Angus Dwyer*



*Ashley Milne*

## “Philadelphia, 1832”

---

Milksick shook the bones of Mary,  
Ague and chilling stole young Ruth,  
Elizabeth lay down with grippie,  
Anne suffered from corrupted tooth,  
Sarah's belly swelled and burst —  
The doctor never told us why —  
I never walk the graveyard past  
They don't beg me to come and lie.

*Amy O'Neil*

# Junk Information

---

(to Gertrude, Adlai and the Phillipians, old and new)

Their accidental marriage, compounded by the final lifting of the veil, became the sensation needed for the next day's news. Emily's mother called the priest at St. John Fisher's; his (though the papers failed to procure particular data, including his name) parents were said to have called the reverend at St. John Fisher's simultaneously. Allie, who called the stop to her own wedding after walking down the aisle with Henry, who was to marry Emily, could not stop crying to tell the pressmen who (what, when, where, how, or why) she had planned to marry; the Episcopalian church stated No Comment, the Catholic church the same, Allie's parents angrily debated with the caterers, who delivered the cake to the wrong reception, though they claimed they were half right, right?, about the price and the bill Allie's parents would not pay, thereby leaving out six crucial bricks in the pyramid structure of the newspaper story, leaving it, at best, lopsided, and too comical anyway for most of us to take as the truth.

The facts were, as Emily explained later, more absurd than invention, were, as Allie explained to Henry later, constructed by devices so beyond the touch of human tuning, that she had to sacrifice her own ideals to the higher ideal of perfection. "Yes, it must have been meant to be," Henry admitted publicly. "I just wish she had been meant to be with me." Most of us who caught the news blurb laughed. We simply imagined Emily and him (his name, please) in the cab or on the plane to the tropical islands where he had planned to take Allie for a honeymoon, introducing themselves and other such autobiographical data, blood types.

Goddamn, you have to understand: it went like this. Rush, rush rush, the ironed underwear and getting the nephew the rings, the niece the flower petals, and a tip in advance to the priest's mischievous altar boys. By the time he'd lifted the veil, everyone in the

pews knew that the names were wrong, the families were wrong, the religion, forever skewered and incorrect, though the church, the families reported, had less than nothing to do with the whole to-do. No one could move until after the priest pronounced them man and wife, until after they started walking up the aisle and Allie in a long white gown ran down the aisle to meet them, wreath of flowers falling off her head. They still had one hundred yards to go before she would've met them; she turned abruptly, before anyone but the photographer noticed her, and ran back outside. After she left, the families in the aisles began to shake hands and smile politely. No one started asking questions until three weeks later.

Still, you have to understand; it went like this: When Emily exited the church with her hand through his arm, a plane with a banner shouting JOY! flown low overhead ticked loudly above, the cleanest of all clacking; the summer smoke of sand and sunned concrete was so strong you could taste it when you talked, March snow thawing into rivers, winter washed by spring into summer: a three season change in one day. He had to kiss her on the steps for the warmth of the day and for no other reason, he promised Allie later in a letter, for the unexpected and unplanned weather, perfection out-impressing the planned; sequined spontaneity a higher law than the rings and years, for the necessary sacrifice of the accidental to the classical.

The television documentary ten years later found Allie in the abandoned lot, leaning out the trailer door, with Mr. Thompson's dog tied to a post outside. The cameramen, who entered through the "unlocked" door, filmed wires and switchboards and dials aglow with pulsing lights in ordered sequence; reflections sharp as headlights off chrome, cut clay shards indicating organization by color code. They cut to a shot of a white carnation on a tin-can coffee table; digital programming and computer animation techniques allowed them to break segments of the documentary with pictures of the carnation in stages of dying. Before cutting the tape for commercials, they showed the carnation on the tin can coffee table, subtitled the "Progress of Withering."

*The Answers. 3¢ / a word with a reasonable addition for inflation.*

- "Thank you. I think they're cool too. Cool color. Comfortable. Cheap."
- "Waiting for my mom."
- "Out to dinner. McDonalds, I think. But we haven't decided yet for sure."
- "She's putting on her make up. Inside."
- "Yeah. Always. Sometimes she puts on too much and looks silly. But it's cool. Sometimes it takes her fifteen minutes. She sometimes has to wash and start all over."
- "I dont know. I dont have a dad so nope."
- "I dont know. I dont care. Who cares? We've lived like this all my life, why should I have to have a dad."

*More. Same deal.*

- "I am Mr. Thompson. Yes, that is my dog. Here, Huck. Here!"
- "Allison, she lives right over there, keeps him for me when I go out of town."
- "To visit my wife. I dont think I've seen you before. What are *you* doing here?"

If you're a goddamned reporter I'll slit your goddamned throat.

That piece you did on Allison was awful. *My God.* Awful. What are you going to do? A piece on me because I dont live with my wife?. Thats not a question you son-of-a-bitch. Awful. Awful awful."

- "Because she lives with her mother, that's why. Her mother moved in - I moved out."
- "Damn right its normal."
- "Good. I'm glad you understand. So you only do pieces on stuff you dont understand."
- "So personal understanding has nothing to do with it."
- "You know it was bad enough what happened the first time, I mean, when the whole thing happened. Did everyone expect her to marry Henry. *My God.* Would you have understood it then?. That's not a question either. And with the baby. That was not

much better. And now this piece you did. Allison's mother, up Dermott county, canceled her cable subscription, she was *that* mad. You people aren't human are you. Not a question.

If you are a reporter I will slit your goddamned pig throat. What about her little girl. You know her little girl, the one you were just talking to, and how mean kids are in middle school."

-"Kmon, Huck. Lets go. I'm not going to make more murder and mayhem for these ... trash. This trash smells like a bad politician:

This thing with the camera. Huck."

*Mr. Thompson is seventy-ish, stick-thin, has graying hair. Not exactly headline material, even for the front page of the Region Section. But I got his picture. Looks scary, like a poet, maybe, disgruntled and a little batty. Protective of Tate and her daughter (Molly). We could make it a suggestive story, weirder than JILTED even. Not a nice man at all. Kept saying he's slit my throat. Maybe we should let QTZ handle it. It feels like an ethical disaster. I mean I feel bad. I mean, dont we have anything else to print. That isn't a question. Sir.*

JILTED flattened the charts into two-bit number stacks, matched x for y the ratings of prime-time television. After the sequence aired, the People and Places page of the Post-Tribune quoted QTZ-President John Anderson, who used to be Johnny-D, before QTZ started to swing upward on all of the graphs we hear about but never see, with saying: "QTZ has really hit the jackpot. We've really made it big now, really made it big time. This is it. Our cash cow. Watch out NBN, CTS. QTZ is up and running now." My mother, who taught Johnny-D English in fourth grade at St. John Fisher's (Episcopal), folded the paper in two and called his mother. My mother placed the paper in the trash. Mrs. Anderson had moved to Florida, according to her answering machine. If Mrs. Anderson had left a number on the machine, a wire'd run short, cropped the end of the recording. Allie's mother filed some papers downtown; WPTZ recorded CONVERSATIONS WITH JILTED as their "special," on the early morning show. When I stopped for gas on the way to work, a neighbor pulled over and asked what I was listening to on my way to the city. I generally listen to the car: see if it's

making any sounds, if it's choking or wheezing or puffing or just rolling nice and easy. He said, turn on WPTZ, you won't want to miss this one. So I did. I heard Allie's mother sobbing into my radio all the way to work.

My mother called me on my cell-phone in the middle of a meeting. I excused myself. "It's Allie," she said. I had expected this. I knew QTZ would want to film Allie's father flinging himself on the casket though he hadn't paid child support when she was growing up and never paid for the catering cake from the mistaken wedding ten years ago. No doubt QTZ would make a reference to burying her in the right cemetery, though St. John Fisher's (Episcopalian) and St. John Fisher's (Catholic) cemeteries run across each other's properties. "No, dear. She isn't dead. She built this funny-looking tower on top of the trailer - threw her food stamps out the window in a paper chain - invited the QTZ cameraman in for coffee and then..." The battery went dead.

The man Emily married and moved across the country with ... whose missing name forever: left news stories disfigured and devoid of symmetry or science, bent mystery into the articles, severely distorted them: the greatest crisis to cross the grey print (rolled, snapped flat with a rubber band and rapped down before the door-step) since the electronic newspaper ... had eyes the color of shifting earth: once green infused with dark topaz: all the moody hues of a quiet river running blue in the sun and brown in the shade: never one color and never the same color twice in a lifetime.

With the two children in bed upstairs, Emily crossed the living room and slapped him across the jaw.

He said ouch. Emily sat down and wrung her hands.

"I think we should have a fight," she said.

He rubbed his jaw, "Yes, yes, dear, now that you mention it; I think we should."

Emily curved into the lean stroke of his arm. "I just don't think we can pull it off."

"What can we fight about?"

"And for how long?"

"For gods sake, Em, not more than a month."

The Parental Wars began the following Tuesday, at eight am sharp. Emily splashed her face, kissed him and darted out the bedroom door. The children woke at nine, walked downstairs to the kitchen, and found Emily moving back and forth on her chair as if with weeping.

"Whazzup with no school, mum?"

"You're father and I are having a fight, honey. I couldn't get you up." She did not look up. The children exchanged looks, took some cookies out of the jar and took a basketball out to the backyard ... played for days without changing their pajamas.

And so all of the people in the town on the hill rise up / and gather outside the trailer door \ in the equalizing black of evening. The red glint of occasional lit cigarette tip moves lip high, sways downward, a field full of swinging tailless lights. Light from inside the trailer falls into the outside. Molly falls into the outside. She looks like if she had had a broom she wouldve whisked it, whisked them off of the porch that wasnt there as if they were dust that wasn't there either.

"Go away! Go away! My mother is sleeping."

The cigarettes bend to break with ash. The feet shuffle.

"I know you. All of you," says Molly.

Nobody could remember for the reporters' reports what she said after that, the words she spent in the night at them, but by the end of her hot fast words they had left, one at a time, the oldest first, grinding their cigarettes into the dust with their heels, until not one was left standing. Molly goes inside and closes the trailer door. The light leaps off the pavement as if sucked back into the lamp from which it came. *No story. No go. Run another Feature. What about that boy who fell into the river and drowned. The swimming champion. Erskine got a good shot of his father flung over the casket. Good profile shot. Potential front-page material.*

Love is always a misguided passion. People fall in love misguidedly

so. Then they need people who are not in love, or not enough in love to not reason right, to guide them out of love. Love is like a hall of mirrors where everything looks bright and shiny. Love is a mighty misguided passion. Anyone who has lots and lots of babies is either stupid or misguided, which might amount to the same molehill, but might not, depending how you like your words. Misguided -> you have lots of babies -> you have lots and lots of nameless babies. Nameless for two reasons:

-Because they are babies of a misguided love.

-Because all the good names are given up to the babies born before, first. Belated babies have no names.

Or they have weird names, like you wouldnt name your cocker-spaniel. Dictionary names. Names that sound good: Mike Pike, Joe Jello, Daisy Hope. Last names. Phone book names. Ex-boyfriend names. As a last resort: deadbeat dad's last name anyway. When your daughter is in love with a man, she is devoted to him like a dog. That is why she let Johnny-D do the show on her. Well, he had good parents. He's the news anchor, and she had gone to grammar school with him. He used to stick gum in her hair and we would cut it out with scissors when she came home from school. I think that if you looked at someone every night on live television who used to put gum in your hair, you would fall in love with him too. Because it is a misguided passion. You would not fall in love with a good man who loved you and wanted to make you decent, even if he had nice shoes and good manners. Live television. Imagine that.

*And imagine it back. Misguided love, and misinformed hate. You could say it was a backlash in the winding. Jack and I were listening to the police radio channels, the "night cops beat," [I so named it in a poetic mood] when we heard about the gathering - at this point was all it was. Jack was just there because he couldnt sleep - it was really my watch. So I went. By the time I got there, everyone had gone home. I wanted to try the trailer door, but I was scared - news about the old man who threatened to slash Jack's throat was spreading just like fire on gas.*

*The newsroom at five in the morning when news is breaking:*

(if it be it the best kind of news: plane wrecks - preferably unexplained, the earthquakes and fires and mass suicides) JUST SEND CHOPPER THREE. The newsroom when news is breaking is when you blood pumps as if with a purpose. It's like waking up in the bed of your favorite character on your favorite TV show and looking at your hands and seeing their hands. (All hands look almost alike on live television, so it must be looking at their face when you stand before their mirror) that charms your waking up and pumps at your blood and pumps and pumps and pumps.

The newsroom was wound when I walked back in the door. Even Mr. Anderson was awake. Jack had already programmed the machine which puts your script on the screen. He said he already knew what happened.

"SEND CHOPPER FOUR!" I advised.

Chopper Three. Check. Chopper Four. Check.

Jack started reading, "An unidentified mob attacked the trailer of Allison Tate and her daughter Molly early this Tuesday morning without any stated reasons. The police are searching for motives and the perpetrators. Chuck Reed has the story. Chuck?" Jack grinned. Raised his eyebrows and grinned some more.

"Everybody left. There was no one there except Tate and her daughter who were in the trailer, I guess. No visible damage. No story. No go. Run another Feature."

The classical bodies, in classical pose, the bands of gold, and red, red rose - Emily and her husband tried to keep the Parental Wars continuous, but a midnight snack sneak wrecked their act.

They had had a fire going and were looking over briefs for a case on a broken microwave that had exploded in someone's kitchen. The newspapers had run a story Emily called "outrageous" and a radio mock followed which surely left the jurors convinced on the side of the multi-millionaire microwave company.

The Questions: at the cost of the cost of printing, add margin for profit

*Q: Sir, do you mean that the contraption in the trailer was not there at all - that the whole story was invention?*

*Q: It was a stove. Mr. Anderson: were there or were there not devices for abortions.*

*Q: Yes or no, please, Sir.*

*Q: Why would you willingly wreck havoc on the community as you did? What were your motives.*

*Q: What were the blinking lights and communication devices to symbolize or represent?*

*Q: What made you think that anyone would ever believe such an absurd tale?*

*Kate Zangrilli*

# Possession

---

It wasn't mine so I gave it to you  
you can do what you want with it, you, it  
wasn't mine, I gave it to you, to you

comes by then sometimes at night  
or calls, brings the construction crews  
and promises, he says he needs measurements, he  
opens my shirt, the cabinets, saying  
different now, picture this in blue,  
and we do it on the floorboards

It wasn't mine but she took it home and unwrapped  
it, left it on her bathroom ledge, filled the whole  
thing with steam while she soaked and outside New  
York was newsprint and didn't smell like roses, but she  
did, so I gave it to her, to her, it wasn't mine, it wasn't

comes back with shoes that talk HA HA  
across the floor at me pulling up the boards  
and when I wake I see he has exposed  
the moldings, mouldering, my left breast  
and there's a man I dunno with a drill on  
my back stroking fluid in again and calling me  
"honey" (as if he didn't know my name...)

I said it wasn't mine but the police didn't believe it,  
all written up in the newspapers, and they brought  
dogs and a stumped lady with the search warrant to knock down  
my bathroom door, but no, I'm soaking with  
the roses, leaving for New York, and she dunno where  
I've left the toenail polish, but I won't let her  
touch it, she rots, she tells them it was mine, and they  
believe her, bring dogs, dogs into the house, I want to kick  
her out, out the dog door, but we don't have one, we don't

tries to apologize, he brings bandages  
and a pair of pliers, printing embalmed footsteps  
(no shoes! HA HA!) across my floor (all  
gone! HA HA!) where I am standing on nothing now,  
there's nothing now, and I would  
say "bleeding quietly" the way they always say  
about fish (is it?) and other dumb animals, and  
he is rubbing my back with something, but that  
must not be good for my skin (no...no) see, that's  
not my skin anymore, see, I have become  
something entirely different, become something,  
become something entirely different  
than when you began me

When you find it, please pick it up, because  
someone must have lost it, must  
wonder where it is, want it back (maybe), just  
don't give it to me, I don't want it and it  
really isn't mine, I promise, and besides  
it cries at night, wants me to rub its back  
and give it hugs and love and care about its  
feelings and its health and no I can't stand it, I  
simply can't stand it, I hate it, I threw it  
out into the street, and it's yours now, if  
you want it, and you must, you must have it, must  
take it, see, take it with you, because I am done, see  
I am done, I am done, I am done,  
I am done with it.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

# Nonliteral Death

---

She peeked out the window. Four stories up, she wondered what the flashing neon red and blue signs were advertising across the street. She wished she could read. Then she noticed the sky, a dark violent purple, streaked with flimsy yellow clouds. If she had known, she would have said: pollution. But she didn't know, and she didn't understand why her mother wasn't home yet, and where her father had gone. And the frail, delicate child stood, hands resting on the window sill. She mused that there was a prince on a shiny brown horse with a black diamond on its forehead, waiting for her below. She inhaled the air, coughing a moment later. A fly flew onto the broken screen, and soon found a crevice to worm through. She backed up a little, temporarily frightened, then resumed her position once more. Loud, fat men went in and out by the doors of the store across the street,. Occasionally, a tall, prude-looking man dressed in a clean grey suit would walk up to the door as well, and at these times, the girl squinted to see if any of them were her father. But she knew it was no use looking. She remembered her father, but she didn't want to remember him that way. He was a tall, thin, almost sickly-pale looking man with tousled hair and smelly breath, and slurred speech. She remembered hearing sounds of a firm hand on a fleshy cheek many a time. Then the fighting stopped, and he hadn't come back since. She gazed outside again, awakened from her reveries by the fierce blow of horns and expletives outside. She thought the sounds queer, but learned them nonetheless, to make her mother proud. She glanced at the clock, like her mother always did, but she could neither read time, nor knew the significance of the hour of the day. So she perked her ears and listened for footsteps nearing the door. Her mother often told her not to look out the window.

"Thah duhty sings out zerr, you haf to be cahful," she would say, in her thick accent. If the little girl had known, she would have said it was an F.O.B. accent. But she didn't know.

When she turned four, her mother cried.

"I didn't wahng us stay heah, you know, fowh ees bery unlucky numbuuh, we live on fowh, you now fowh, ees duboh un-



lucky, you see?"

So everything bad that happened after her birthday, the little girl blamed on the fact that she had to be four. She tried her best to turn five faster, but she soon realized she couldn't hurry this time thing.

Her mother caught the flu twice that winter, and had hay fever starting early spring. The mother also somehow caught the chicken pox again. She had had it when she was young, in Singapore, and she had it again, but worse. The girl attended her and fed her strawberry yogurt, watching the red jelly swirl up as she mixed it with a spoon, around and around. She had a fancy for mixing things. One time she concocted a bathroom-kitchen solution in which she mixed a few sprays of Windex, some Toilet Duck, water, baking soda, flour, soy sauce, and Pepto Bismol, coming up with an orange pasty thing that resembled post-carnival spew in a bucket. Her mother flushed it down the toilet and threw away the girl's mixing spoon despite frenzied protests. That left them one crooked pair of chopsticks and one teaspoon for silverware. For a while, they couldn't both have soup at the same time, unless the girl sneaked a slurp right off the rim of a cracked bowl. But her mother forbid such manners in America, so they took turns.

And now, she was gazing out the window, wondering if and when her mother would return. She used to stay up until her mother crept through the door, gently pulling it shut with a soft click. She watched, eyes closed as far as they could to pretend as if she were sleeping, but wide enough to allow her to see. Her mother would always twirl the venetian blinds closed and gently replace the clear plastic stick. The girl thought her mother was very graceful. Exhausted, the mother would quietly collapse onto the bed, if that ever was possible, and fall sound asleep in moments. After a while, though, the girl could sleep without her mother there. The noise outside no longer troubled her. In fact, she hardly noticed it. She used to be afraid of thunder, the way it sounded so ominous. But she got over that too. The subway roared and hissed, the rain struck tin roofs, and hooting continued just outside, but the girl slept through it all. Easy.

But this time she woke up in the middle of the night. And quietly as possible, afraid to make the slightest sound even in her

own home, the girl floated to the side of the window, and very, very slowly, twisted the transparent plastic stick to close the blinds. And it was then that she realized her mother hadn't been so soft in manner to avoid waking the girl up, but she had done it out of fear. Just like her mother, she slowly replaced the stick so that it hardly swung. And creeping down on her knees, her head just above the window sill, she pushed the last horizontal row of the blind up, so that she could look out and below. She saw nothing, which swelled her heart with relief and anticipation all at once. With no sound, and no change of expression, tears flowed down her face. And slowly, very, very slowly and controlled, she lowered that last blind and crawled underneath the bed, curling up, hugging her knees, and huddled in the corner, against the cold metal of the bedpost. When morning came, she still had not made any noise, unless one detects the silence of a disquieting, continuous shiver, or unless one can hear sweat trickle down the curve of the body, or the cacophony of inaudible horror. She made no voluntary sound through the night, when the eerie hush flooded the apartment, until she bravely crawled out from under her hiding place and pushed up the shade once more at the sound of the shrill wail of police cars and an ambulance. Only then could the child muster enough courage to stand up and walk down four flights of stairs on tiptoe. Once below, she didn't let the front door click behind her, but turned the knob, allowing it to fall into place, and let the knob go. By the time someone noticed her, she was tugging at the shirt of one of the policemen, the one she had chosen to trust, the one who most closely resembled the prince in her dreams.

He looked down at her in all her frailty, her nightgown clinging to her frame from sweat and tears, her dampened hair that stuck matted to her forehead, the silent rush of water that streamed like a river down her face.

"Woh duh mama dzji na li?" she asked in Chinese under her breath, almost in a whisper. Where's my mother? She gazed at the ambulance. Her eyes looked like large black, shiny pearls.

The cop yelled something she couldn't understand; she actually couldn't understand anything, but stared helplessly at the adults approaching her. A pretty woman walked up to her and held her while she collapsed into her arms.

"What's your name, honey?"

With a dazed look, she repeated, "Woh duh mama dzji na li?" Is that my mother? she wondered, her mind registering the shape of the ambulance.

For the first time, the girl cried aloud, so hard she couldn't breathe anymore and gasps came out in quick, short uncomfortable spurts because they had been repressed for so long. Her chin quivered uncontrollably and her eyes stung. The lady tried to soothe her by patting her back gently and singing softly in her ear. So the child fell asleep in the woman's arms, her face red and swollen and tear-stained. In her sleep, she saw the scene again. The stealth with which she carried herself throughout the night, the stealth in which she and her mother had lived all their lives... it all took a toll on her. When she woke up in the hospital, she didn't stop shivering until the woman came again with extra blankets and some hot cocoa and had the girl sit in her lap and sip the warm drink until she her lungs worked properly again. In delirious apprehension, thoughts raced through the child's mind. She feared the death of her mother, but if her mother had died, she would not be in the hospital as a patient herself. She feared abandonment, she feared the people her mother was forced to associate with, she feared life. She feared.

Hopefully, the girl never noticed, but the woman did: the tremors that arrested the child's breath, the sweating. The woman ran for help. But the girl's heart shattered within her, and her mind dispersed, and she sank down very slightly, with an uncanny, unnatural sitting position. Perhaps it was her icy features or the stony manner with which she reposed on the bed, but there wasn't much of a difference. And strangely enough, the change was obvious.

She never showed her ability to hear or think or talk after that day. She just stared with her head wanly tilted, resting on her pale, thin neck, her huge black pearls for eyes dull and unresponsive. Then, it didn't matter what had become of her mother because no one could even figure out what had become of that soft, beautiful child.

## **Fragment of Epic**

---

The Trickster-King with hair of blond  
And black and red, and eyes of green,  
Many-Bodied, Hid-and-Laughing,  
Cunning-man of Warm Thick Places,  
The bladed-tongued, on eight lean legs  
Did walk the labyrinth hid beneath  
Of room 4-B, underneath of the school.

...That was what I thought, anyway.  
I was about to tell Kate one day  
but I didn't think she would of wanted  
to hear it because that was the day  
Todd Kellebrew got paddled  
from Old Yeller — that was Mrs. Hester's  
sawed-off oar. Day that happened,  
you didn't talk about anything else.  
Didn't talk much at all, would be best.  
So I guess we just went out to swing that day,  
again. They would have been watching all of us  
careful that day, especially on the swingsets, to make sure  
nobody got way up and jumped off again.

*Amy O'Neil*

## Pierette II

---

The figure is bent  
at the waist like an angle  
in a geometry book,  
a number can name it.  
Hand to mouth, the fingers,  
drawn thin,  
finish the profile, elongate the chin.

He bows in loose pants,  
with no palms to touch but  
a small smile, washed in blue.  
Transparent but blue. What a  
color (he speaks in French  
when he does speak).  
The other arm is held  
at a tighter degree, and opposing,  
twisted along his back and held in a fist.  
He reminds me of a hit man  
or of a subservient custom. Careful  
and appropriate,  
and of course in blue.

This arm, whichever way,  
you see it, crushes the dripping shirt into  
knife pleats. A photograph of just  
this, his back  
makes the hand invisible, palm-tight—  
only, notice the black-and-white folds,  
wrinkled seam, straight shoulders!  
He must have a spine like an arrow.  
And fingers, too, ready to shoot at the bride.  
I could not photograph this watery blue.  
But the hands, one fist,  
one fishy, clammy swimming  
long—that I could do.



*Miriam Berger*

# To Conjugate

---

I conjugate eyes in all their tenses— blue, green, gray—  
out of yours; or, when you are gone, out of the  
the porcelain knobs on my dresser drawers.

You conjugate excuses for every lonesome being— he was tired,  
she was hungry, and you were not brought up properly.

She conjugates French verbs, like a mantra but too complex,  
as she falls asleep: *je meurs, tu meurs, il meurt, nous mourons,*  
*et cetera.*

We conjugate the singular into the plural, wait in the rain,  
and say, “Ah! Another...”.

They conjugate the constellations and widen the highways,  
bringing gray into green and twisting time—  
so let them pass you by; get lost under the dust.

*Anne Bourneuf*

# The Girl in Black Trousers II

---

There is a gold Klimt  
on her wall and there  
my head turns one way,  
my body another.  
What—quite an audience!

I used to have a farm  
on my bedroom floor,  
some kind of wood and softly  
lacquered paints.  
Flat pigs, flat cows, flat fences  
on green stands,  
also flat and the same thickness.  
They lined the molding  
and fit in every stable crack  
and they made sounds  
from their flat bodies. I knew  
they were wooden.

I am two-dimensional,  
standing straight up like  
slim branches, pants-legs  
springing to life in black and green  
along an old tree.

The turned legs face all ways,  
eyes rimming in perfect circles.  
I face two, and only one with each part—  
comparison stops. Though I do  
wear black rather than gold.

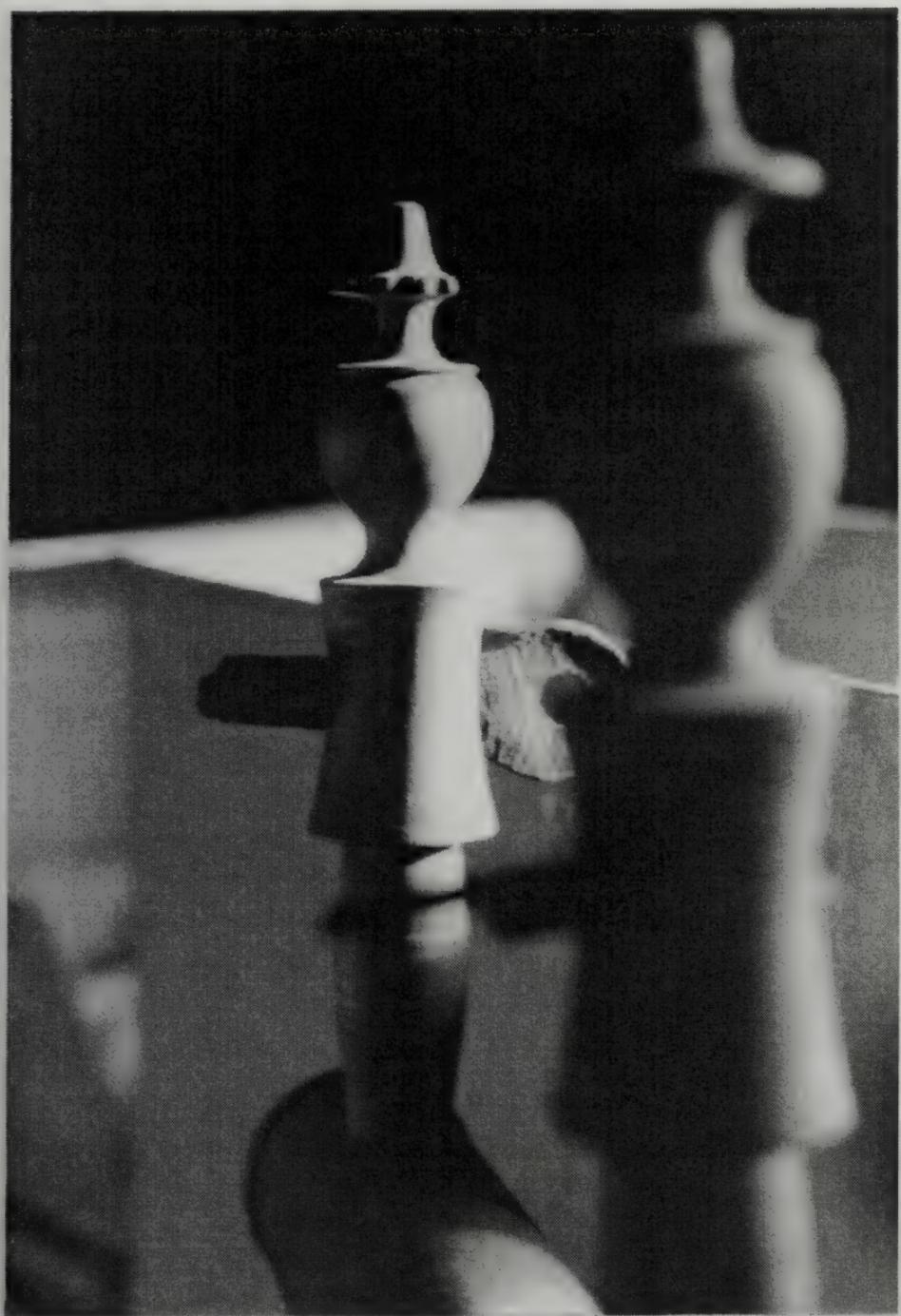
*Kate Nesin*

## Other Things

The minutiae already belong to you. Names  
Of restaurants, Mendehlson's string symphonies, dusk.  
It was yours. In those other times, there was the  
Quiet life; shards of lavendar disrupted Tuesday's.  
Landscape's were dispossessed, birds flew low and  
Rivers, unmoved, flowed down, ever down.

Now we fall to the old mistakes; whether green lies  
Outside my voice, whether the print, if you read,  
Would rhyme with fallen stars. In all the canvases  
You saw yellow and hands. I saw rutabagas and farm  
Implements. The paintings are different now; thick  
Swirls of color lie over the original, our original;  
But the pentimento remains.

*Charlie Finch*



*Heather Smith*

# Salmon Pink

---

I'm wild and bare  
on the windowsill

The click of imagery  
exposes me

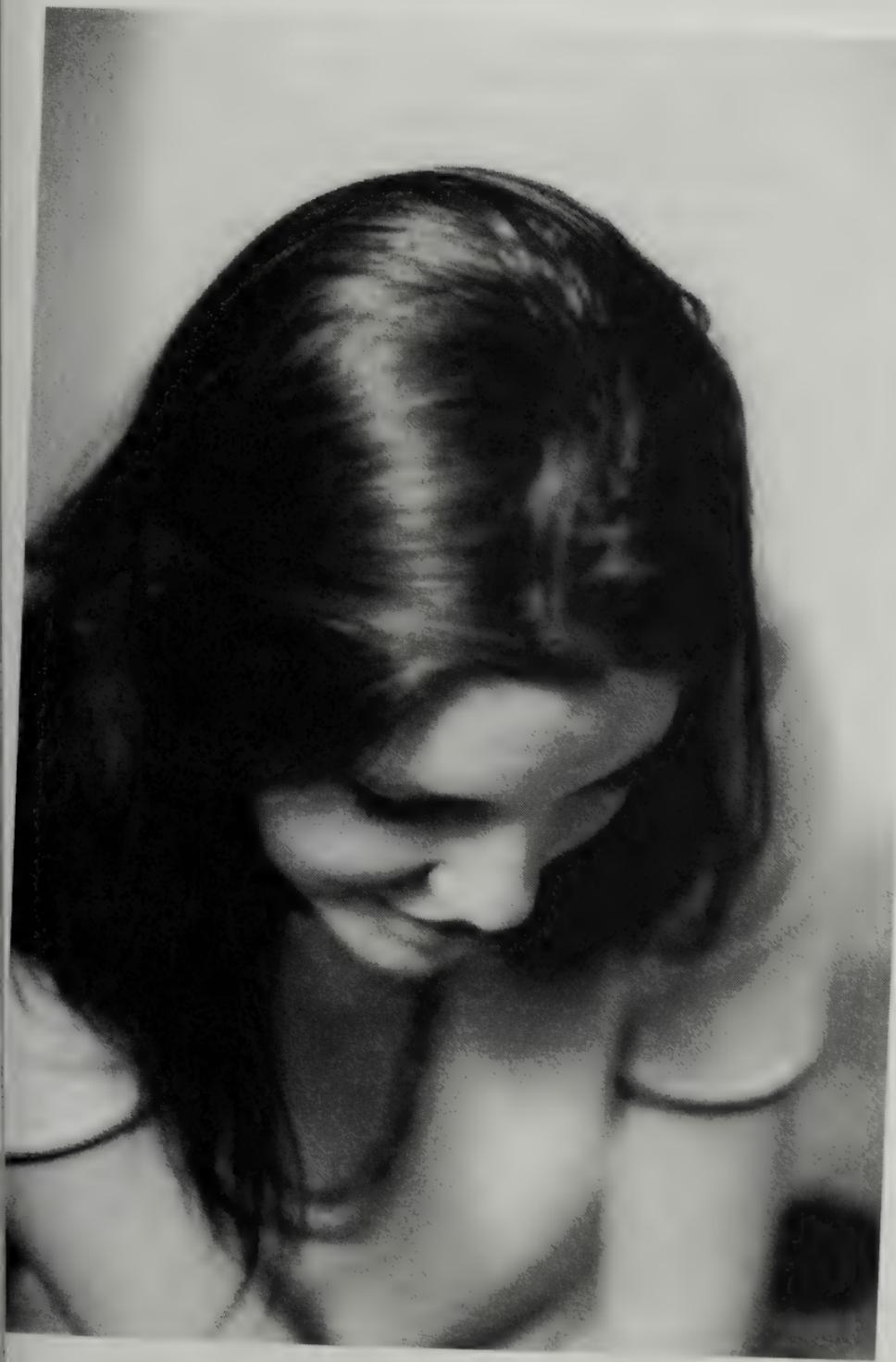
As I twist and turn  
my nipple existense  
to perfect the pertness

Wanting to be beautiful  
behind the snow  
as she finds the perfect  
angle to put into eternity

I love to watch  
her curves  
as she crosses  
to the garbage  
to contemplate  
the powers  
of  
nausea

And I think to myself  
how wonderful it would be  
to fall in love  
with this guera angel  
standing before me

this clicking wiccan wonder



*Mimi Tseng*

# A Dream That the House is Haunted

---

The color of your mouth  
is so pretty when you yawn,  
stretched over even teeth  
and a thickish jaw. The color  
accentuates the stretch,  
is accentuated by the stretch.  
That is enough.

Just when I most want to stay  
I turn to ghostbusting, green light sabers,  
and protecting everyone.  
This place is haunted  
and your mouths are all over—  
no eyes seen—closed.

You smell like coffee and coconut oil.  
Or perhaps it is the room—  
ghosts carry smells with them in their hands  
after all.  
(I did not know that there was  
oil in a coffee bean)  
Add the milk and sugar.  
It is addictive and also so  
so  
lovely.

*Kate Nesin*

# The Humble Adventure or Naivete

---

It's just me and my boots  
and those bands of primary colours  
striping across the snow like flags of speed

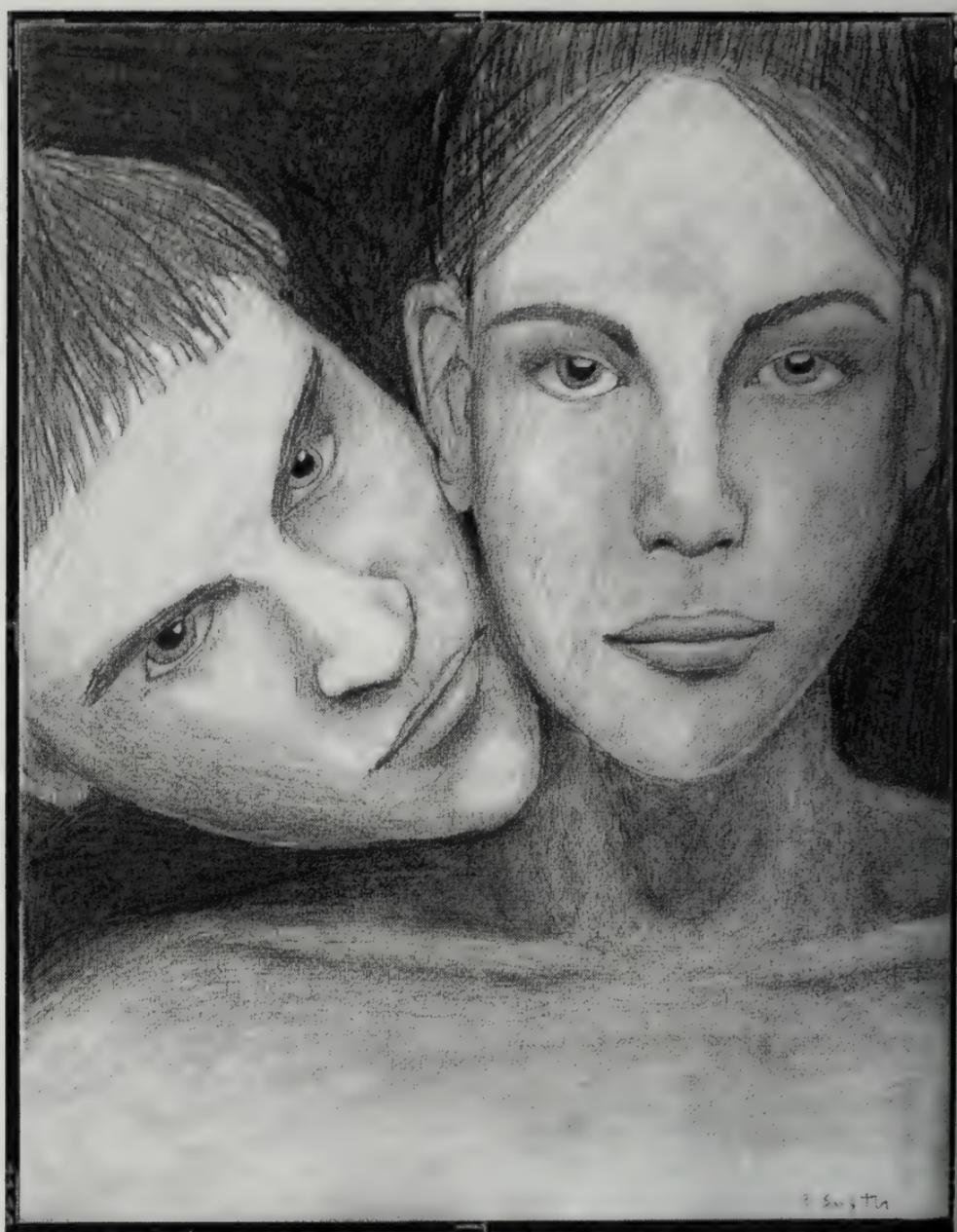
I can see, I can move  
the talkative friends at my arms are gone  
separately exploring Saturdays

Old churches, European laundromats and  
brick sidewalks curved in waves of  
red and dirt

I can move, I can see  
the matronly scarves that preserved my delicacy  
have unwoven themselves

caught on the stark limbs of deciduous city trees  
(black throats and arms against so much white)  
dangling there, apart  
lone strands  
separated by the wind that curls across the sky.

*Caitlin Berrigan*



*Katharine Smyth*

# Storms

---

“But the water surface ripples, the whole light changes.”  
John Ashbery-The Skaters

Before this one, clouds break off in twos and Threes. The celestial paradigm again misguides Us; allegiances are abandoned; thick eyes ache and Close. Meetings end with a quick good-bye.

A dropped scarf here, a call there.

The twilight turns autumnal, resigned men Drop their pace. In the end, they all walk alone. Still, they remember; to before the rain, when They didn't need moons and books and fires. Lightning forks, thunder dissociates. But they Remember other times. Times without abstraction. They walk now, as the sky darkens and the rain Softly begins.

*Charlie Finch*



*Ashley Milne*

# Rest my dear city

---

Before the morning dew  
will settle upon  
the front lawns of projects  
of dead presidents  
The city that never sleeps  
needs to wind down

The old men in the bodegas  
pull down  
the gates of protection  
colored by the tags  
of disenfranchised youth  
while hearing  
the squeaking crying and complaining  
of the local rat residents

The pairs of New Balances  
and Reebok Classics  
hanging from the lines  
of communication  
sway in the windy recesses  
and twirl around each other  
pointing to the life of the town

The women line up  
along the Point  
to hustle their chocha and teta  
merchandise for negotiable prices  
for the lonely men  
whose wives are doing the same

Freaks come out at night  
-this night marked  
by the orange hue streetlight  
blood red white blue police car siren rays  
fire and sun bulbs of the inferno

all mirrored in the flowing pool of life  
collected next to Paco  
and the hole in his head  
-a bad drug deal went wrong apparently

Shiny Lexus ES 300's and Benzo's  
with their posh executive owners  
cruise the FDR along with  
the dusty Impala's and dollar cabs  
in order to make their overnight getaway  
from these insomniac streets

Stray cats and dogs  
meow and bark with joy  
and stroll the night of the sidewalks  
in the shadows  
so their orphaned owners and the ASPCA  
won't crash their party in the alleys

A lonely front page of the Daily News  
flies across the street  
along with the spirits of those select few  
whose time passed  
and flew into the cushion of the concrete  
(it was a lot more comfortable than their living hell life upright)

The hum of the underground 6 train  
lets the poet know that  
the city has had its sleep  
but it was only a quick nap  
because here comes  
the punk tax collector  
to cop his Jesus pendant  
loot and I Love NY sweater

*Anthony Morales*

# Logo Fancy

(for the materialistic ones)

My need to jiggy is unquestioned  
Tommy Hil Nautica Gianni Versace and Donna Karen  
all know my name  
My style is simple  
Rugby (collar up of course)  
my carpenter jeans  
and the construction Tims  
The outer gear apparel is strictly North Face  
for the sub-zero New York nights

Sure I gotta pay a hundred or more for a shirt  
but so what?

Yeah I know Mom Dukes is on welfare and my baby needs diapers  
so what she'll pull through like she always has

So what if I gots no life?

I didn't ever go to school to learn anyway

When I roll up in the party  
every chick is up on it  
As soon as those greenish eyes  
of a honey-dip  
sees Tommy Hilfiger emblazoned  
across my bony chest  
all is forgotten about my appearance

Honey slowly approaches  
switching her Polo hips and showing that fly Nautica chest  
and I flash my decked out superficial smile  
Miss better come correct

I wants a girl with DK and Diesel  
and the bigger the patch that Ralph Lauren  
puts on her ass the more it looks apple shaped  
Our matching Polo Sport fragrances clash  
and our lips are together in  
unsubstantiated happiness

Uh-oh

what the deal with money in the Avirex leather  
that shit must have cost 150 bones  
it 's on

I said to myself as I slowly followed him  
on his way to see his mother at the old folks' home  
From behind the car  
I jumped out and said  
A-yo gimme yo' shit I want the leather  
oh you got a link too gimme it

Can you believe that he tried to run?  
Something in me just snapped  
grabbed my piece in my pants  
and I messed up my new jacket  
with a bullet in the back of the chief's head

Fuck it

I sold the holy leather to buy a new pair of jordans

Now them cats-both the fellaz and ladiez  
in school will be up on it  
with my new shiny bloody kicks  
and the real crucified Jesus piece across my neck

*Anthony Morales*

## **St. Brighid's Day**

---

Blocks, slips, line  
in gray and  
pale yellow butter paint.  
The brush strokes are so clear  
and wide, I can also see  
the sable's back,  
thousands of hairs, heraldic color,  
mourning clothes with carnivorous eyes.

St. Brighid's crosses, lozenges  
woven in thick and thin straw,  
make wide strokes also,  
against the white wall, sharp shadows  
like stones.  
I will lay out water and salt,  
witty pieces of meat in diamonds on the table.

“every second day fine  
from my own day onward  
and half of my own day”

Put away the candlestick and half the candle. Fine,  
it is spring.

*Kate Nesin*

# Armwrestling Jesus

You can see me there, through the hothouse wings of the blackflies having a smoke on the ledge. I'm there when you look through the window combed with ivy and running rash vines, a woman who needs to be watered, the sort who fries your order, the one who'd arm wrestle an

August noon if he'd buy me a beer after I beat him two out of three. You could see me there, frozen between familiar stools and dishes of margarine and fake sugar and smells of people who aren't coming back. But I'd move faster than a hangover to let down the blinds before you could. I'm not sure I should take my hands from my face anymore.

I'm an old woman now. The fillings of my teeth don't reflect midday like the nickel tips in my register, and my faces shed slower than the days on the calendar over the soda fountain. I'm bruised and rotted, the crop of me is dry, and all I can do is wish rain. My days know each other better than the bingo tournaments and visiting hours of a nursing home. Morning turns me on with the kerosene for bacon on my range and the sermons of the People's Court, and I end every one in front of a picture of my Lord who died for my sins while I wait to die. You couldn't have picked one of my days out of a line-up, not until today.

Maybe she saw me through that window, but she came in with the kind of questions that were far past seeing. Sue Leonard came through my door, not bothering to wipe her feet, and managed one of my stools through the runs in her pantyhose and the knots in her hair.

"Hey, Georgia. How's Jesus made the spring for you?" she said, handing me a bind of tulips. Sue was one of those girls who wouldn't know when she was eight and half months pregnant, who picked you flowers without wondering what kept your house or who caught the sun for you as it rose.

"Well enough, Sue. I've got apple strudel in the back, and icy Coke. There's always icy Coke," I said, knowing perfectly well that she didn't give a goddamn if Jesus had turned me to a sheep

and sheared me naked for a comforter. And you didn't bring in flowers for an icy Coke.

"No, no. I'm afraid I have a weak stomach. I came to ask your help, Georgia. You probably cock your ear worse than fleidden dogs do. People come to you for fried chicken or extra napkins. Your cafe doesn't have any airs of a confessional, but I don't know what else to do. I remember that when my Mama had a problem, she wouldn't hide her purse in the cigarette drawer and her key under the mat to elope with some fancy man. She came to see you, Georgia. Mama's in her plot now, so I'm letting her memory speak for her. Can you help me, please?"

As Sue's heavy lips fell quiet and her toes through the holes in her second-hand flats began to twitch, she undid the knot that tied that day to others. She took barber shears to it, made me open my eyes to what I'd been. I'd been the midwife to people's troubles, cast iron lips until their speaking stopped. I'd been still as the principal's office, letting centipedes dance on their shoes and egg harden on my frying pan. I'd been the one who took their tomorrows from my oven.

I was never the sort of girl you took out to the bars. I didn't own heels or lipstick, but they pillaged the bakery aisle at the grocery store for me, or rented me one of those films that made my cheeks flush red to even think of, or they scrawled a note on a napkin and left a beer from the bar I wouldn't go to. My only companions were my washing machine and the used car salesman on the radio, but I looked at what they left and took my breath from their thank yous. It was what I was and all I had, the only roll of the dice I'd get, and the more I thought, the less I liked the smell of that roll.

"Go ahead and tell me, Sue," I began for her.

"Georgia, my Billy wants to drive a truck. You know what happens to boys who drive trucks. There'll be girls who will wear their dresses off their shoulders, and he'll want to have tobacco in his back pocket for appearances. And he'll actually like the beer. He'll spend his allnighters before the fall of a week and he'll never stop for a rest or a cold or a mother. What can I say to him? I can't tell him he's my baby any more. He unbuttons his shirt two or three down to let the hair on his chest show and he wears buckle on his

belt at least double the size of the largest fish his father ever caught. Men step aside for him at the bowling alley and waiters call him sir. He's surely not my baby any more. I can't tell him he's the one pulling the string to make my next morning come. That's crazy talk, and besides, what if love's not enough to keep him?"

Sue breathed hard, her face flushed like a person who sits too much, and waited. What was my advice worth? I'd never had a man to shovel my walk or kiss my cheek and end each day at my side. There was a legend I'd heard somewhere between the coffee and fences of this town, that the drift of birds always leaving just above your roof knew where love hid. Cedar waxwings they were called, and I never stopped looking up to follow them. I'd even gone to Lover's Point and waited with the biting flies outside the steamed windows of parked cars for someone to come for me, but the stars wouldn't stop mocking me, and all those birds did was shit on my windshield. I had no baby, no hair to braid, no birthday cakes, no hands to wash before dinner, no one to take some of me with them. I had a record in arm wrestling, cracked dishes and the love of the Lord. I didn't have a thing.

"Please, Georgia," she said, her hands pleading.

"Well," I said, "you have to let him go. You've kept him well. He's a clean boy. He holds the door for ladies and his tips aren't half bad. He needs what that truck will bring him, and who are you to take it from him? You're his mother, but he's got to take that truck down the road before he's done, and that road will keep returning him to you if you love him enough to let him leave. That's better love than keeping him ever was."

Ten o'clock struck again before she was ready to go.

"Dear, Georgia. I always thought my mom was wise, but she smoked without a filter and she'd go out the front door with lipstick on her teeth every now and then. But she was wise, I see, to come to you. You should be in the chorus at church, Georgia. God's voice shouldn't be kept in by diner doors. Bless you plenty, Georgia." And as she started her truck, I sat down at my counter to look over that roll of the dice that I'd made yesterdays ago. It was empty of hands to hold me. There were no tulips left to wilt on the grave I would have, and there wasn't anyone to cry over them. But I'd made

---

mornings, and thanked or not, those people would remember me.

I can face the Lord on my bedroom wall now, toe-to-toe, and meet His eyes. I'd arm wrestle Him, but I only take a match if I have a chance to win, and the Lord's arm is long. So when I forget to breathe, and the kerosene on my range blows out, that breath will have been enough for Him and enough for me. I've taken my hands from my face.

*Mary Ziegler*

## **Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds**

---

When the bells on the door have chimed is when I come and take what they've left behind. People leave things behind all the time, newspapers, snubbed cigarette stubs, ratty wool gloves. I like it best when they leave tips. Quarters and crumpled bills that I smooth and tuck into my gingham pockets feeling the weight against my legs as I walk. People leave arguments, lovers, spilled coffee, smeared drugstore lipstick. I come with a dishrag and I wipe it all away until the Formica glitters again and I walk back behind the counter in my nonsensible shoes.

Someone left these shoes behind too. Before she left I wore good sturdy orthopedic waitress shoes, clunky and dependable like linoleum and amber tinted plastic cups. A woman with two men giddy with dancing and champagne twinkled in with snowflake shoes on pantyhosed legs. I brought them coffee. I inhaled the perfume and alcohol and cigarettes and February air that clung to them. I didn't say anything. I never do. Customers at 2 A.M. need no company but their own, and I'm enough for anyone, including myself, and on this shift I see night at its deepest and its weakest.

She kicked off her shoes and giggled as the men massaged her dance-weary feet and admired her jawbone below her diamond ear dangles. I brought her a coat hanger for her mink. I hung it above them like a nightmare on the coat rack, next to the men's wool and satin coats. I watched the snowflakes drown themselves in the midnight fur.

When they had caffeined themselves enough they left, carrying her lolling in their arms like a society Raggedy Ann. They left smoldering cigarettes and a wadded bill and her Cinderella shoes. And so I kicked off my sensible shoes and slipped hers on. The rhinestones sparkled so I scrubbed the formica until it did too to the rhumba rhythym of her stiletto heels on linoleum. I pirouetted back behing the counter, heels chattering like metronomes.

I used to be a musician, would sit there for hours on the

glossy bench and play minuets, rondelles, sonatas, bachellettes, spilling off the page, spilling off the keys, faster and faster, overtaking the metronome until my fingers were hummingbirds, were nightingales, and the notes collided and blurred in endless variation and then I would slow down and draw the notes out as long and heavy as summer until the metronome was exhausted and the notes hung in the air like wings vibrating. And so I tapped my fingers in their cheap chipped polish across the flecks of mica on the counter to the sway of the coat hanger and the click of the mink glitter lady's shoes. The counter was my harpsichord, my baby grand and the pad of my fingertips on its surface tossed up music into the air and the music was mine, and I was making it. Outside the snowflakes were falling and glittering too, dancing to the music of my hands unaccompanied.

*Katherine Gilbert*



*Julia Tiernen*

# You Said It Was About Music

You said it was all about music,  
And that every girl's face was a sonata  
Made into cheekbone, eyebrow, quick glances,  
And that the rhythm of hers  
Was as complete and abstract as  
The coolest jazz.  
So, suffer in time.

This pretty conceit of yours...  
Yes, you tied your own cruel irrationality  
To Art (the capitalization is yours, not mine), and through that to  
The Mystery of Existence (again, your capitalization)  
With the same delicate floss  
With which the Christians tied faith to reason.

(You said that art was transcendent  
Because of its unconscious articulation  
Of a meaning of life;  
Thus, you esteemed poetry above dance.)

She was your ghost, made visible  
By the accumulation of tones.  
The outline of her body showed through  
The polyphony she wore on summer days.

Sometimes, she wrote bad poetry, too allusive and dull.  
Other times, she looked through you,  
Straight through you,  
Towards the east and the ocean and the mourning doves and the gray light  
To lean over and whisper in your ear:  
*Your philosophy bores me. Can't we talk about something else?*

Because you know you never knew anything about jazz.

*Anne Bourneuf*

# Hearing Things

I was on my bicycle when somewhere  
the world came crashing down  
It must have burst into flame,  
but trapped in time and place  
sounded only like my gears grinding

On the path a boy yelled  
“Mom my shadow’s bigger than me!”  
He held to his mother’s leg, held to his eternal soul

The skycap lady at the airport was the devil  
She had 2 inch red claws, translucent eyes,  
evil throat blurts  
I tipped her two dollars and flew away

tonight was so dead silent you could hear her in California,  
some distant laugh shattered by an owl’s indigo moan

The night the trees exploded I heard  
continents collide- ice on the branches  
reached to the trunks  
In the morning the lawn lay pocked  
with Blue Spruce, White Pine, Red Maple  
amputated limbs on a white tile floor

The whole world is asleep and raining

I have a friend I visit, smiles hospitably  
he only knows one song for his mandolin  
and he plays me “simple gifts”

This week the New York Times Magazine  
held an article by an editor- he hates  
Henry James, Pynchon, Proust

When he opened Vanity Fair he was  
subdued by the perfume page  
red hot lips on fire  
He dozed off, television buzz

Squirrels outrun us right down the middle of M-119  
because they can't get up the snowbanks  
Last night traffic stopped on State Road-  
giant horses in the headlights, biting the concrete  
their legs & breath a foggy Hemlock stand silhouette

I've spent entire seasons staring  
at the Islands across the lake  
the large one has two light houses,  
restaurant, jeeps for rent, mini-golf  
The adjacent Isle has a supple cove,  
immaculate stones, foot path-  
there are knee-high houses  
the Indians built to harbor their souls

The rain off the roof sounds like Art Blakey  
rumble in the mud, pitter-pat

Stuck in the airport, heard  
the sonic boom of six fighter jets.  
headphones on- it took the tiny men  
exactly the length of 'exile on main st.'  
to prepare the plane-  
silver and nickel starcruiser in the grey sky

the sound of a weeping Gray Owl

*Will Glass*

# The Search for Truth

---

I want to find the darkness where you can't see me  
Brown owl with the yellow eyes, you don't owe me  
Darkness is clean and loneliness is dark  
Your light is dirty and your vibe is too

A daily disgrace is what I see  
Each morning you insult yourself  
Assuming upright is for you  
I say peace is deliberation for a pure place  
But the sun will melt your ears.

*Justin Fay*

# composing wrong notes

"in the museum they set up the drums all wrong  
reversed hi-hat and snare" -gaster del sol

The Ceremony  
was not easy.  
as ushers have cleft this into  
one ring or another,  
and all hours spent  
of purity, of the divine.  
wrong notes everywhere, never finding  
their wrong notes.

The Ceremony  
was not easy.  
later, and drunk on secrets that  
father passed me, those plastic  
champagnes were everywhere and  
the drummer missed a tap or two,  
but the notes were wrong together.

The Ceremony  
was not easy.  
the importance of it all(this) is so  
hard to conjure. so sometimes we forget.  
now it is all together though,  
the music is swelling into the mouths  
even notes have found a place  
divided and the same.  
while the wedding yellows  
of age.

*Erik Jungbacker*

# My Ancestors

---

I do not remember where I was  
—no, that is not right  
I was in one of two places

Standing over a scaly podium of irrevocable red tiles  
I saw life concentrically evaporating into the hillsides!

Or it was at a play—an opera

The seemingly miscast lead actress pleading,  
“Let’s break into song”  
And when she sang, so high, so unexpected  
a song my father sang to me when I was young

I closed up  
and just became  
a ball of salt water  
listening to a sea  
that had no language

For you see, I saw something else  
It is said you feel in your head, sometimes your heart  
But this I saw in my stern, my central gut  
    a tired woman by a stream, not old, but with a face  
    and then—not  
    it had broken away into wisps of shattered white stuff  
    papery yet heavy  
    spine-broken on the edges  
She was me  
    She had my face!

*Christina Richardson*



*Laura Oh*

# Dream

---

Mom, I had a dream  
That we were outside shoveling snow  
When suddenly you hurled your shovel  
And walked silently inside  
It felt like getting my nails filed,  
    as if the manicurist were delving into the plump static current of my  
    throat  
It felt like eating raw oatmeal,  
    one indigestible pulp of grass

I want to know you  
I see and hear you, I am afraid,  
    of the numbness beneath my fleshy fingers  
    the telegraph line up my spine  
    your small stomach

You are as impossible to touch as diamond glints on snow

*Christina Richardson*



*Miriam Berger*

# The Finishing School

---

So Father, you are sending me to finishing school.  
Good, I would like to be finished. I would like to be whole.  
Make me complete.  
Finish me.

I walk the lengths of the school's glassy halls  
They reverberate with the murmurs of sad dead girls  
"Finish me."  
Portraits, bereft of experience, stare to the depths of each girlheart  
Unenlightenment crawls the walls, and  
each sheds her skin finding yet another grown underneath

*Christina Richardson*

## The Fall

Caitlin Berrigan



Miru Kim

*Mirv Kim*

# Night Knelt

Night knelt as it hushed the din of all those noons, and folded down the last corners of the day. It came softly, piping through shirtsleeves and buttonholes hung out to dry, and riding the spokes of bikes left on their kickstands, speaking in the distant bicker of hammer and nail. It came softly, but Candy could hear it sure enough, and couldn't help but be quiet as it blew out the last murmur of the day and bid her light a match. Elijah sat beside her on the trenches of somebody else's lawn, his thumbs fiddling the spines of the grass. His eyes flickered up to the blue eye of the flame and then to hers.

"I could share a milkshake with the stars, you know that, Candy. What better a friend than one who's willing to split the night? They give a light so you can read the north on the compass of your flying machine and keep away closet monsters that could wait in the black. Who needs parents when you have a friend so far up there, watching over you with ember eyes?" He spoke, sighing into the blade of grass between his teeth.

"I always thought the stars were presents, only better than any you could bind with ribbons and tin foil. Night came to hide my daddy's fists, but I could hear mom crying through that blindfold, and her bruises were just as black and blue come morning, and her hands too swollen to hold onto mine. It was awful dark," she said, mumbling to the ground more than to him.

"See that star up there, strung crooked between the corner of your eye and the edge of the sky? If it ever gets too dark, there I'll be, waiting with the engines of my flying machine all ready to take us away forever into morning, and to hold onto you as much as you need. I'd wait there for you, Candy, no matter how dark it got."

He finished and she smiled into his shoulder so that he couldn't see. She shut her eyes, because it would never be dark again really. And she blew out the match.

Elijah McKay took long strides as a shadow would, stuck somewhere between floorboards and yesterday, good for nothing but collecting dust. Someone had struck away his only friend with the match-end

of a magic wand, and Candy was all eyelid shutters and breath in time with the minute hand as she slept, not good for all that much. He had no reason to stay and no reason to go away. No one waited at the crosswalk of the stars for him, but his pockets were swollen with quarters and he still had a taste for a watermelon slushie. Summer sweated the brow of that night as he walked, so that his bangs melted onto his forehead and all the lights on barbecue grills and old ladies' curling irons had been flicked off to gag the heat. It was the sort of night when you ought to have a slushie, and besides, with the straw making a fence between the gap in his teeth and the raw red syrup from the bottom of the cup and his throat, he might be real again.

The parking lot of the gas station was the tail end of a funeral, quiet as swallowing your own spit. Anyone with any sense had slept away that night, through the sweat on their undershirts and the unholy curses of their fans. Or they sat in the dark and spoke to shadows about the weather, how it killed grasshoppers and broke the necks of wheat, how it scalped drunks and buckled your knees and wet your brow so that all you could do was talk about the weather.

He walked, forgetting to bow to the bell on the gas station door, and stood on the bottom shelves of breath fresheners and chewing tobacco so that his voice would carry over the counter.

"Excuse me, Mister, but if I were to give you fifty cents, would you be willing to give me a watermelon slushie?" he asked the stubble on the man's chin.

The man laughed through the filter of his cigarette, his eyes creasing under the brim of his baseball hat. "Sure, kid, and I can give you a whole fifty cents back besides." His knuckles hovered over the register, dirtier than factory smoke and unshaven old men, and after he rang up the order, the handful he gave Elijah was more than just a receipt. "Here, kid, have a lottery ticket. Its what keeps me going, better than the can opener for my fried beans and the cracked eggs for my early-shift yolks. Take this, kid, but don't scratch it all at once. We all need a chance at luck once in a while." He winked at Elijah's heels as they took him away to his watermelon slushie, past the shelves heavy-lidded with magazines that told you where to have your hair done when the world ended.

But pilgrimages had a way of being hacked apart by knights

with tinfoil swords or by empty gas tanks. His ended in a pair of too familiar feet, toes near scuffed away from wandering, the feet of a travelling man.

Love's leash hadn't been too short for Aaron. He'd left Elijah with drowned waffles in cold syrup and too many slammed doors for even the fire department to reopen. He'd left him for a waitress with a dirty apron, left him to neck on park benches and howl at the moon, to play dolls or house or whatever stupid games girls kept their knees clean with. Elijah didn't understand, but he knew that love sewed a thick blindfold.

"How've you been?" Aaron poured into the silence.

"I've been watching the night dry up into black-eyed flies. Or maybe I haven't. No matter about me, Aaron. The moon is ripe and they're playing a monster flick at the drive-in. Time sifts quick, Aaron. Better go. Love doesn't wait for friendship." Elijah finished empty, the line his anger made going slack on the aisle floor.

"You don't have to tell me, Elijah," Aaron mumbled. "I don't know if you can ever forgive all this, or if you should. All I have left to know is that you've given up your name and pawned your front door to find that place. And I want your hand to be in mine when we come there, where morning will be finally warm on our backs and where the sun will never stop rising on us."

"You know, I've heard that you could forgive anyone for a watermelon slushie, even someone who cracked the wings of your flying machine with love, especially if he'd been your only friend, if he were your travelling man." Elijah finished and held his knee, held it so tight that he could never run away again. So he left with only one watermelon slushie, but he figured that the luck in his pocket, better luck than any you could scratch away with a penny, was worth fifty cents any day. They went back again to greet the road as night fell, walking past the light in other people's windows, trailing the heels of night for what it owed them.

*Mary Ziegler*



*Melissa Bramowitz*

# Untouched

---

the rebeginnings of birth  
- solvent, as the fixtures of beauty  
your voice to the desert  
evaporates and rains  
in the city

in her you found  
temporal majesty, temperance,  
a temple — to what rash wind  
that ravished and snapped  
newborn branches  
in succession

lines, her eyes; her hand,  
extended, the same wrist  
which turns back and forth  
as if to part you, parts me  
in two  
as if for a forgetting

I am near mulattoed in your mind  
a writing in the sand  
eclipsed by wind

*Kate Zangrilli*

# You're too picky

She is a heartfelt glance  
and in her troubles  
you try to pull her out of a muddy puddle  
maybe a ditch.  
You wake to dreams  
and like moonshine in your eyes  
or the fuzzy glare of a headlight  
her soft walk  
and graceful air pierces you.  
Shepard, dream away  
through the door, you can see the dirty slush  
shoot out from under the tires of an Explorer  
at your jeans  
and a ruined day.  
You're too picky.  
Stop trying to catch fish in trees.

*Lisa Hsu*

# These Locusts by Day

“These locusts by day, these crickets by night  
Are the instrument on which to play  
Of an old and disused ambit of the soul  
Or of a new aspect, bright in discovery—”

Wallace Stevens-Things of August

I am no longer interested in the external.  
Interest in something that doesn't exist  
is less than air. As last week, the vernal  
equinox “took no prisoners” and left. A tryst  
took place between the seasons. The verdure  
of spring and summer; the unceremonious murder  
of green in fall and subsequent cold. That  
is what I shall remember of the year. The moon sat  
on the half-frozen lake, dissapeared and returned  
in spring. Was I the perceived? What was discerned?  
The light pulled away.

Those were other times.  
Now there are no colors, small plants. Unmoved rhymes.

*Charlie Finch*

# Nietzsche Picking His Nuts While Waiting For The Manhattan Bound A Train

---

Row, row, row your boat  
gently down the stream  
merrily, merrily, merrily,  
life is but a dream

*"The process of cellular isolation is complete."*

A dream that's just kinda hangin' out there like a powerful one-dimensional cosmic string...you know it's out there but them supercomputers of human advancement ain't gonna detect them no matter what. Wanna know why? Wanna know why? Cuz there just be some things *out there* man. Wild things. Crazy things. Things like Zip Coon slashing Jim Crow with a razor forged from the iron of irony, while the progressivists turn over in their graves, realizing that their mission has reached the point where it has defeated its own purpose. Things like the existentialists cryin' somewhere in limbo, 'cuz it turns out that due to humanity's recent course of events, they just may have been right, but they really didn't want to be right; everybody wants a purpose. Wild things man, I tell ya; shit you couldn't even begin to learn and simultaneously unlearn, much less quantify.

*"Very well, obviously we must proceed toward the next logical step of nutrient starvation so as to accelerate the cell's movement toward a state of quiescence."*

Everybody's dead now, you know. At least all the real ones are; vanished into the vacuum created by the lack of what they referred to as morals, and ethics...but I don't know what those are...I wasn't engineered that way.

*"Have the cells attained a state of quiescence yet?"*

*"Yes, the miotic phases of G1, S, and G2, were completed approximately 2.3 seconds ago. I will now proceed to the transferal of..."*

*"Wait, have you already confirmed that the quiescent cells possess the normal amount of DNA, we don't want to take any chances..."*

*"You're right...my apologies..."*

I'm sitting on a bench in the abandoned structure which was once the center of activity referred to as Grand Central. This was the nucleus of the city. The A train, B, train, C train, D train, F train, 1 train, 2 train, every fucking train converged at this point. Here they collected, here they imploded, where they could all become one powerful force due to their great mass and velocity. Here they coalesced, and further confirmed the theory in regard to the nature of the universe before the Big Bang, that at one point in time, all the forces in the universe were one and the same; electromagnetic attraction, weak atomic attraction, strong atomic attraction...all the Goddamn same. Here they coalesced, and demonstrated that such unity is a scientific possibility...that all forces can become one, that everything can just get along...

*"We're ready to take the cells out of the embryo now..."*

*"Continue..."*

*"Done...what now?"*

*"Pray."*

*"Pray?"*

...Then it occurred, then everything went nuts. Then that naked singularity, that tiny itty bitty mathematical point in space and time where all our known physical laws break down, exploded. Everything began to expand, all the forces moved away from the point of origin, and their movement changed them, their velocity altered their natures. Everything began to evolve. Everything became different, and the mistake transpired from the belief that because things were different, they weren't interdependent anymore...

*"We have a successful prototype..."*

*"Are you sure?"*

*"Verification was enacted and has given us 99.99% confirmation in respect to the success of our procedures..."*

*"Dear God..."*

*"Who?"*

...That was the error; when everyone believed that they had evolved so much. That the explosion had expanded them and will continue expanding so that they will get further and further from that naked singularity that was a piece of God's will, if not God's will itself. They didn't realize that the explosion was simultaneously an implosion: that the forces expanding from that single mathematical point in space and time were also converging toward another single mathematical point in space and time that was a piece of God's will if not

God's will itself; and from there, they would explode and expand again, to converge at another mathematical point...and on... and on. This is what the trains did. That is why they were important. The subway trains were illustrators of God's will. They moved out, converged at Union Square, radiated from Union Square, converged at Penn Station, radiated from Penn Station, converged at Grand Central, radiated from Grand Central, converged at Union Square, radiated from Union Square...and on...and on: because the individual paths of each train were circular; they repeated this process over and over because that is what life is all about...circular motion, explosion, implosion...all coalescing to form the complex/simple asymptotical equation of life. The asymptote?-none other than the undefined function divided by zero that is but one of the infinite equations used to express the existence of the Engineer. But I can't tell you anything about him. I wasn't engineered that way. He didn't engineer me...

*"Mr. President, where exactly does this hostility toward scientific progress stem from? We should not be so childish as to discard of something because it seems unfamiliar and possibly even dangerous. Good things can come out of this scientific success; we can clone animals by the dozens to reintroduce endangered species into the ecosystem. We can scientifically generate animals which can be bred and slaughtered to feed millions of starving people. Hell, we can probably rid the world of hunger entirely! Medical science will be revolutionized! We can clone humans using the techniques of our recent successes to create human lab rats! It'll be great! We can experiment on these manufactured homo sapiens so as to gain more knowledge and insight on the effects of certain radiation and chemicals on human bodies."*

*"Wouldn't that hurt them?"*

*"Mr. President, who cares! Just slap a patent number and a bar code on them and we can make do with them like any other manufactured product. There will be medical breakthroughs; kids in high school can dissect humans instead of frogs so as to get a better idea of the stuff it takes to be a medical practitioner. Hell, if they want, we can give them clones of themselves to dissect; it'll be a new way to undergo the process of self-discovery! We can make clones to serve as soldiers. That way we won't have to sacrifice any of our boys in the upcoming nuclear war, which you and I both know is gonna happen. So when it does, we send them manufactured soldiers to the front lines, and when they get shot up, cannon-balled, napalmed, bombed, exposed to radiation and biochemical weaponry to the point that their balls drop off, they literally vomit their own intestines, they turn into vegetables due to the termination of proper nerve activity, and their lungs implode, hell, who cares,*

*just leave them on the field, and send in a new batch of manufactured soldiers to the front lines. We'll never lose another war! The United States of America, the great red, white and blue, in God we trust... ”*

*“Who?”*

*“...will become the most powerful nation in the world. We'll have an unlimited supply of soldiers, policemen, guards, and other components of national defense. Then, speaking in terms of a totally different aspect of society, prostitution will be revolutionized as well!”*

*“Prostitution?!”*

*“Sure! I mean, come on, there exists a legislative debate in every state which contains a major city as to the legality of the world's oldest profession, right? Las Vegas has already gone legal with their whores, right? So I say let the federal government make it legal throughout the whole nation, because jeez, whether it's legal or not, there will always be somebody, somewhere, holding a specimen of male genitalia in her left hand, and a one hundred dollar bill in their right, right? So make it legal, but get this; make it so that all the prostitutes are clones, and make it so that the prostitutes are genetically designed so as not to get pregnant, not to contract or transmit disease, and so as to be clones of the country's most popular super models; Anna Nicole Smith, Halle Berry, Salma Hayek, Marilyn Monroe! It'll be great! Me personally, I can't wait till they send me my ordered clone of super model Christie Brinkley. I'll be railing her every night! She's been engineered so as not to have children...heh, heh, forget contraception...and forget marriage...when a guy wants his pipes to be cleaned all he's got to do is visit the local whorehouse and pick the most beautiful of the genetically engineered bunch, it'll be every guy's fantasy come true!”*

*“There are serious ethical questions here.”*

...You see, I was engineered by one of the engineers that the Engineer engineered. They sent me all over the place. World War Three; I was there. Now that was a bitch. World War Four; I was there. That wasn't so bad; I was used to the napalm and the radiation by then. Vietnam; I was there. Vietnam? Yeah, Vietnam! They put me in the original device used to experiment with time travel...it worked.. and of all the places to send me they sent me to fucking 'Nam with a bunch of other clones, so that we could try to change the outcome of the Bad War. We got our superior, advanced, specialized, red, white, and fucking blue asses kicked all over again by those dinks, because what happened is we actually went back in time and *won* the war, but *then* Vietnam, (which in the future, past, present, whatever the hell you wanna call it, is the world's leading superpower) developed their own cloning and time travel techniques and sent their own clones back into time to mop up the swamps with our marine fatigues *all over again*. I tell ya, when I came back to the

present, future, past, whatever you wanna call it, I wasn't quite the same.

*"As the UN delegate of my nation, I speak on behalf of myself and my country when I say that we will not stand by and allow this to happen."*

*"Listen you , just because for once we're ahead of your chernoble-fart laying ass..."*

*"This is wrong...you are not creating humans, you are creating the destruction of all society as we know it..."*

*"Yeah, you're unstable society, you son of a..."*

*"Shut up...you cannot take the place of God..."*

*"God is dead, my friend, God is dead..."*

...but that doesn't matter now, they're all dead. They're all dead because they couldn't exist without the existence of a little something they referred to as soul. There was one big soul you see. That soul was God. That soul underwent a Big Bang, and became trillions upon trillions of little souls, which reproduced so as to give a little piece of their soul to another life form. Then these souls expanded, communally getting closer and closer to that asymptote. Then a few of these souls fucked up, and tried to *become* that asymptote, which was just Goddamn stupid, because that First Soul was insulted, and He died. He just collapsed in on himself like a dying star.

Because of that, the amount of soul stretched thinner and thinner as the world's population increased, and there was no source of soul, because the First Soul was dead, and all the animals by now were clones, so their ingestion would not provide one with soul, because clones do not have souls. They do not have souls, because the Engineer didn't engineer them. An engineer trying to be the Engineer engineered them. Man can create a physical embodiment of himself. Man can mold the clay. But man cannot give the clay soul. Man cannot blow into the clay. Only God, the First Soul, was able to give of his breath, and of his soul, because he was the only one with the proper training and qualifications to do so.

So, this dilution of soul became exponentially worse and worse as the population increased exponentially; and this occurring dilution and God's death manifested itself into a worldwide epidemic. You see, God died like a star; collapsed in on himself so that now He is a Black Hole somewhere in the universe with a singularity at its center. (This singularity will eventually form the basis for the recreation of the universe when it explodes during the blockbuster sequel The Big Bang 2.) But it must not be forgotten that when a star dies, it first turns into a supernova; it expands with power, and wrath, and a lot of gas. This supernova manifested itself

within the fact that sexual reproduction provides the human race with an infinite number of genetic combinations; genetic combinations which occur for the betterment of the race. One of these benefits is developing immunity toward disease. However, since a good deal of real human males were now railing genetically engineered whores instead of other reals, this threw off the ability of the human race as a whole to fight disease, and when a world wide epidemic of AIDS HIV HERPES GONORHEA ADIARREAH which is an anagram for something I don't remember right now, hit the Earth, everyone eventually died. At least all the reals died, for this epidemic was a supernova which only latched itself onto those with soul.

So I'm just sitting here on this bench in Grand Central looking at that clone bum on the other side of the main lobby, sipping a Heineken, scratching my nuts. Ain't got no soul. Ain't got no soul.

*Yaqub Prowell*

# In the End

---

in the car, hit him, hit him  
when I am green like this go

ghost-girls rising in my mind, pilgrim  
black shoes  
stomping out paper sheaves, a sour  
taste and you  
(you smelled like that, young, once)  
you are sitting there not letting me  
apologize,

why?

it never was  
fashionable to carry  
a blood bag, to carry on  
like this, I did, oops, drive fast

strung out, on pills, cuz I love him  
or something  
that might have just been his friends, dunno

had cigarettes in a building staggered  
and found pigeons  
wrote *pigeons*  
out in front of the 7-Eleven,  
with an arrow, remember?  
we must have been waiting for the train

christ  
or crackers, kids this  
was definitely not a library  
we were shaking the door, m'am  
and it was locked

yeah yeah it was us, not lost  
we were just  
circling the block.

*Caroline Whitbeck*

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